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GEORGE PHILIP MURRAY LAST

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

AFTER THE 'SOCIALIST SPRING' IN THE GDR
A STUDY OF COLLECTIVISED AGRICULTURE IN *BEZIRK* ERFURT

PhD April 2006



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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the role of low level political and economic functionaries in the organisation and management of the farming collectives, the implementation and development of agricultural policy and the parallel development of the East German village in the 1960s and 1970s. With the completion of the (forced) collectivisation of agriculture in the spring of 1960 began the next major step towards the socialist transformation of rural society in East Germany. The process by which over subsequent years the rural population came to terms with this new situation and by which the SED regime established new systems of economic and social organisation in the rural communities of the GDR was long and complex in comparison with the campaign for collectivisation. Using a broad range of archival material from state and SED party sources as well as Stasi files and individual farm records along with some oral history interviews, I have made a thorough investigation of this process with respect to one of the GDR's 15 regions (*Bezirk* Erfurt). This thesis examines on the one hand how East Germans responded to the end of private farming by resisting, manipulating but also participating in the new system of rural organisation and on the other how the regime sought via its representatives to implement its aims with a combination of compromise and material incentive as well as administrative pressure and other more draconian measures. In addressing the roles and responsibilities of the various levels of functionaries involved in the development of agriculture, my research has contributed to a more differentiated understanding of the nature of authority (*Herrschaft*) at the grassroots in the SED dictatorship, which qualifies the simple top-down model of the transmission of authority and a starkly dichotomous view of the state and society.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABV	<i>Abschnittsbevollmächtigter</i> (Local Police Officer)
AIV	<i>Agrar-Industrie-Vereinigung</i> (Agro-Industrial Union)
BArch	<i>Bundesarchiv</i> (Federal Archive)
BDVP	<i>Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei</i> (Regional Authority of the German People's Police)
BHG	<i>Bäuerliche Handelsgenossenschaft</i> (Farmers' Trade Cooperative)
BPA	<i>Bezirksparteiarchiv</i> (Regional Party Archive)
BGL	<i>Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung</i> (Factory trade union leadership)
BLR	<i>Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat</i> (Regional Agricultural Council)
BPKK	<i>Bezirksparteikontrollkommission</i> (Regional Party Control Commission)
BPO	<i>Betriebsparteiorganisation</i> (Factory/Farm Party Organisation)
DBD	<i>Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands</i> (Democratic Farmers' Party of Germany)
DBK	<i>Deutsches Bauernkongress</i> (German Farmers' Congress)
DDR	<i>Deutsche Demokratische Republik</i> (German Democratic Republic)
DFD	<i>Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands</i> (Democratic German Women's Association)
DSF	<i>Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft</i> (Society for German-Soviet Friendship)
FDGB	<i>Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund</i> (Free German Trade Union)
FDJ	<i>Freie Deutsche Jugend</i> (Free German Youth)
GAP	<i>Gemeinsame Abteilung Pflanzenproduktion</i> (Common Unit for Crop Production)
GDR	<i>German Democratic Republic</i>
GO	<i>Grundorganisation</i> (Basic Party Organisation)
LPG	<i>Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft</i> (Agricultural Collective)
LPG T	<i>LPG Tierproduktion</i> (Agricultural Collective for Livestock Production)
LPG P	<i>LPG Pflanzenproduktion</i> (Agricultural Collective for Crop Production)
JEA	<i>Jahresendabrechnung</i> (End of Year Accounts)
JEV	<i>Jahresendversammlung</i> (End of Year Assembly)
JHV	<i>Jahreshauptversammlung</i> (Main Annual Assembly)
KBK	<i>Kreisbauernkonferenz</i> (District Farmer's Conference)
KAP	<i>Kooperative Abteilung Pflanzenproduktion</i> (Cooperative Unit for Crop Production)
KAS	<i>Kreisarchiv Sömmerda</i> (District Archive Sömmerda)
KLR	<i>Kreislandwirtschaftsrat</i> (District Agricultural Council)
KOG	<i>Kooperationsgemeinschaft</i> (Cooperative Community)
KOR	<i>Kooperationsrat</i> (Cooperative Council)
KOV	<i>Kooperationsverband</i> (Cooperative Union)
KPKK	<i>Kreispartei kontrollkommission</i> (District Party Control Commission)
KPdSU	<i>Kommunistische Partei der Sowjet Union</i> (Communist Party of the Soviet Union)
MfS	<i>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit</i> (Ministry for State Security)
MV	<i>Mitgliederversammlung</i> (Members' Assembly)
MTS	<i>Maschinen-Traktoren-Station</i> (Machine and Tractor Station)
Nazi	<i>Nationalsozialist</i> (National-Socialist)
NES	<i>New Economic System</i>

NÖS	<i>Neues Ökonomisches System</i> (New Economic System)
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> (National Socialist German Worker's Party)
NVA	<i>Nationale Volksarmee</i> (Army of the GDR)
RdB	<i>Rat des Bezirks</i> (State Regional Council)
RdG	<i>Rat der Gemeinde</i> (State Commune/Village Council)
RdK	<i>Rat des Kreises</i> (State District Council)
RLN (B)	<i>Rat für Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft (Bezirk)</i> , (Regional Council for Agriculture and the Food Industry)
RLN (K)	<i>Rat für Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft (Kreis)</i> , (District Council for Agriculture and the Food Industry)
SAPMO	<i>Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen</i> (Foundation for Parties and Mass Organisations)
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (Socialist Unity Party)
Stasi	<i>Staatssicherheitsdienst</i> (State Security Service)
ThHStAW	<i>Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar</i> (Thuringian Main State Archive)
VEB	<i>Volkseigener Betrieb</i> (People's Own Factory)
VEAB	<i>Verein der Erfassungs- und Aufkaufsbetriebe</i> (Union of Produce Collection and Purchasing Companies)
VEG	<i>Volkseigener Gut</i> (lit. People's Own Estate i.e: State Owned Farm)
VdgB	<i>Verein der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe</i> (Farmer's Association)
VPKA	<i>Volkspolizeikreisamt</i> (District Police Office)
Vw	<i>Volkswirtschaft</i> (National Economy)
ZGE	<i>Zwischengenossenschaftliche Einrichtung</i> (Intercollective Institution)
ZK	<i>Zentralkomitee</i> (Central Committee)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Betriebsegoismus

Enterprise Egotism: Catch-all criticism attributed to farms and factories thought to be acting in their own rather than the common interest.

Bezirk

Administrative Region: In 1952, the Länder which made up the territory of the GDR were divided into smaller administrative regions, mapping the state bureaucracy on to the party bureaucracy.

Bezirksleitung

Regional SED Administration

Bezirksparteiaktivtagung

Assembly of select SED members with leading roles in particular fields in the region.

Bezirksvorstand

The leading members of one of the Bloc parties in the *Bezirk* e.g the DBD

Delikat

Chain of shops established to sell 'luxury' food items to the population.

Eingaben der Bevölkerung

People's Petitions: formal complaints made in written or verbal form to any state or party official or body. Essential to the gauging of popular opinion and popular concerns.

Genossenschaftliche Demokratie

Collective Democracy: the practice of including collective farm members in the running of the LPG through ballots in the members' assemblies on specific issues, as well as election of members' to the directing board and advising commissions of the LPG.

Grossbauer

Wealthy farmer: technically any farmer owning more than 20 hectares of land, or operating a capitalistic enterprise.

Kleinbauer

Small farmer: technically owning less than 5 hectares of land

Komplexeinsatz

Integrated deployment: the use of several machines (often from several LPG) in conjunction usually during the harvest.

Konsum

Standard all purpose shop, often the only retail outlet in small villages

Kooperationsgemeinschaft

Cooperative Community: The collective term for two or more LPGs contractually bound to cooperate with one another in some aspect of agricultural production

Kooperationsrat

Cooperative Council: A body comprised of delegates from each of the LPGs in the cooperative community, usually the LPG chairmen but also other leading members of the LPG, including brigade leaders or SED party secretaries. Meetings of the council were attended too by village mayors, although they tended to be seen as irrelevant by LPG chairmen. The primary purpose of the council was to arrange and agree upon the terms on which LPG, and later LPG P and LPG T cooperated with one another.

Kooperationsverband

Cooperative Union: A body with its own council of delegates, designed to coordinate the relationship between food industries and LPG. Cooperative unions were established to organise the production of specific crops or food products involving a number of LPG with other institutions (e.g. slaughterhouses) in the vertical chain of production from the raising of calves through to their processing as sausage over a wide territory.

Kreisverband

District authorities of one of the block parties e.g. DBD

LPG-Aktiv

LPG Committee: Pre-cursor to the formation of an SED Party Organisation, these Aktivs were designed to bring SED and non SED members together who were active in promoting and developing collective farming practices within the LPG.

Nebenerwerbsbauer

Part-time farmer: a large number of part-time farmers were forced to abandon their land to the LPG and receive a share of the produce in return as part of the collectivisation. In the 1980s in particular however industrial workers were encouraged to take up farming on small allotments, which were not easily fitted into the large field systems of the gigantic LPG in order to boost production.

Neubauer

New Farmer: A beneficiary of the land reforms.

Offenstall

An open stall shed: designed as a cheap and easily constructed shed for holding rapidly increasing numbers of livestock during the late 1950s and early 1960s. More often than not, however they proved counter productive.

Ortsbauernführer

Local Farmers' Leader: Nazi affiliated local agricultural functionary during 3rd Reich.

Parteitag

Party Congress

Sozialistische Betriebswirtschaft

Socialist Business Economics: system of accounting and incentive measures designed to improve the efficiency of financial planning under the terms of the New Economic System

Umsiedler

Refugees from the East settling in the GDR

Vorstandssitzung

Board meeting: the LPG were run by chairmen supported by boards of LPG members elected every two years. The board and chairmen were to meet ideally every week to discuss the business of the LPG, managing everything from matters of discipline (often drunkenness) in the workforce, to questions over the long term development of the LPG. Preparing the resolutions which were put to the vote in the full members' assemblies, they were a vital part of the functioning of 'collective democracy', qualifying the power concentrated in the hands of the chairman.

Wehrmacht

The army of the 3rd Reich

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INTRODUCTION

It is commonly recognised that the GDR was a dictatorship. Under the auspices of the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* or SED) whose dominant position in government was never legitimated by free democratic elections, judicial, executive and legislative powers were also never rigorously separated, compromising the rule of law and allowing the infringement of basic human and civil rights in the name of the party's ideological goals.¹ The nature of the SED dictatorship, as it changed over the forty years of the GDR's existence, remains nonetheless a matter of considerable debate among historians seeking to explain both the causes of the state's longevity and its ultimate collapse. Using material largely unexamined since the collapse of the GDR, this thesis addresses the role of low-level political and economic functionaries in the organisation and management of the collective farms (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften* or LPGs), and the implementation and development of agricultural policy in the 1960s and 1970s in *Bezirk* Erfurt. In so doing it aims to illuminate the changing practice of authority (*Herrschaft*) at the grassroots and contribute to our understanding of the interrelated history of politics and society in the middle two decades of the GDR's existence, as the SED regime gradually attained an unprecedented level of stability, yet found itself increasingly vulnerable to financial collapse.

The implementation of SED agricultural policy occurred via an administrative network which was by no means simply a well-oiled conduit of dictatorial authority but was itself evolving. At the grassroots the mere creation of the LPG and the establishment of a hierarchy of chairman and work brigade leaders on paper did not automatically create a channel for the consistent transmission of information and authority. Moreover farmers themselves were no willing dupes, nor indeed merely victims of the imposition of state power. Particularly with regard to agriculture where knowledge of the locality and the intimacy of the connection between the farmer and his land and livestock retained an economic value (above all under the constraints of the shortage economy), the practice of authority necessarily involved an, albeit unequal, dialogue. The aspirations and policies of

¹ Ross, C., *The East German Dictatorship* (Basingstoke 2002) p.20: Ross also points out however that there are "well founded doubts about the analytical usefulness of the term".

those leading the dictatorship were necessarily re-shaped to some extent in accordance with the interests and objections of LPG farmers on the ground. The context in which this process occurred was defined in large part by the shifting educational and political background of the LPGs' leading functionaries and their relationship with their constituent farmers on the one hand and with the state and party hierarchy on the other.

During the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the SED leadership pursued the development of agriculture on an industrial scale and sought to make the process of agricultural production not only more successful but more responsive to the demands of the economic system - more predictable and thus more plan-able. Against the background of technological development and economic fluctuation, the farming population themselves were necessarily incorporated into a new apparatus of agricultural administration, whose basic unit was the LPG. In the process their understanding of farming – not least of ownership and responsibility to the land - and their relationship with the state and to their fellow farmers underwent considerable, if gradual, redefinition. The contexts in which those working in agriculture pursued their careers and conceived of (and foresaw) their future in the GDR were very different in the late 1970s than they had been in the late 1950s or even the late 1960s. The changed context of the late 1970s was the product of considerable conflict between farmers and the SED regime. Over the years the limits on the expression of divergent opinion or resistance to the implementation of SED policy were settled incrementally. It was also the product however of an, albeit limited, compromise, in which the aspirations of the SED leadership were necessarily mitigated by the process by which its authority was transmitted and received. The attempts of collective farmers to assert their own interests not only in spite of or in contradiction to, but also increasingly in conjunction with those of the SED culminated by the late 1970s in the establishment and consolidation of essentially new structures of farm organisation and stable systems of agricultural administration which appeared to guarantee steadily improving incomes and working conditions as well as steady (and plan-able) improvements to productivity.

A degree of internalisation or at least acceptance of the norms of the socialist system certainly took place in the 1960s and 1970s among the GDR's farmers, driven to a large extent by the reduction in the size of the agricultural workforce and by the steady growth

in the proportion of those with technical training in the forms and methods of socialist agriculture. The limitations on rights to property, to participation in decision-making and self-determination and to the articulation of complaint too became self-evident by the late 1970s.

Furthermore across the economy and society as a whole in the GDR in the 1970s, the end of radical social upheaval and economic austerity marked a high point for the stability of the SED regime. Internationally recognised in 1972 and a signatory to an international declaration on human rights in Helsinki in 1975, the GDR appeared outwardly to have achieved an unprecedented degree of harmony both domestically and internationally. The introduction of welfare and consumerist measures designed to bring about immediate improvements to living conditions, alongside continually improving wages brought too an unprecedented degree of affluence to the population at large. For many, if not all, members of the collective farms levels of income, levels of educational attainment and working conditions too reached an unprecedented high. Improvement was by no means universal however. Moreover underlying this harmony were the beginnings of serious financial crisis.

The cost of welfare and consumerist policies, (as well as a failed yet costly attempt to develop a high-tech electronics industry) in the GDR came at the price of an ever increasing national debt, much of it to West German banks. This debt, compounded by the negative impact of increases in oil prices on the international markets and the reduction of some financial support from the Soviet Union, began during the 1980s seriously to undermine the GDR's economic stability. This had serious consequences for agriculture in the GDR which more than ever depended on the ability of the rest of the economy to supply it with machinery, fuel and chemical fertiliser. Under increasingly desperate economic conditions, the mistakes of over-industrialisation of agriculture and the vulnerability (when faced with shortage) of the structures established to coordinate agricultural production were exposed. Working conditions in farming became thus increasingly fraught with crises at the same time as rural communities in general were badly hit by shortages in the supply of consumer goods and a growing environmental crisis.

By the end of the 1980s the effectiveness of the system of agricultural organisation was being seriously undermined by economic stagnation. As the GDR headed towards bankruptcy and the prospects of future stability in agriculture, as in other sectors of the economy, receded, so the ability of the SED leadership to satisfy the expectations which it had set itself and encouraged not only the population at large but also its constituent functionaries throughout the state and party network to adopt, seemed increasingly unattainable. If the basis on which the SED regime could achieve relative stability had been established in the 1970s, by the late 1980s this stability was increasingly fragile. The clear superiority of the West German economy and the failure of the SED to sustain the standards it had set itself or even play the role it claimed of protecting the interests of the working class and the peasantry, left it with as little popular support in the countryside as it had in the towns of the GDR. Ever-growing problems of production and increasing differentiation in the quality of life and the standard of working conditions in rural communities had compromised the validity of the material and epistemic bases of the SED regime's claim to legitimacy from a population which expected much better.

Bezirk Erfurt

In order to maintain a focus on the grassroots relations between the party, state and farming collectives, the scope of this study is limited to the villages of *Bezirk* Erfurt, the largest and westernmost of the three regions (*Bezirke*) formed in 1952 to replace the former *Land* Thuringia in the south west corner of the GDR. While being roughly average in size and number of inhabitants compared with the GDR's other *Bezirke*, it has the added advantage of allowing the examination, from a regional perspective, of some of the broader issues faced by the GDR during its existence. Religiously the population of the *Bezirk*, in containing a concentrated minority of Catholics in the north-western Eichsfeld region alongside Protestants of both the Lutheran and Reformed Evangelical churches, reflected the mixture of Christians in the GDR as a whole. Its long border with the Federal Republic makes possible too examination of the regional impact of the erection of the wall in August 1961. Five districts (*Kreise*) in the *Bezirk* bordered West Germany: in the far north the district centred on the town of Nordhausen, in the north-west the Eichsfeld districts around Heiligenstadt and Worbis and to the south west, Eisenach district. Lying

between the Harz mountains to the north and the Thüringer Wald to the south, *Bezirk* Erfurt covered 7,349 km² and comprised 13 rural districts and 2 urban districts (Weimar and Erfurt) subdivided in 1970 into 803 settlements of which 49 were classed as towns.²

Prior to the GDR's existence, the state of Thuringia was largely cultivated by relatively small family farms, lacking almost any grand estates of the size which existed in the north east of the country. At the end of the war 98% of the farms were under 50 hectares in size, cultivating 84% of the arable land.³ As a result the effects of the initial land reform - the expropriation of large landowners and the parcelling of property to be handed out to *Neubauern* ("New Farmers" – largely industrial workers, refugees or formerly landless farm labourers) was felt less severely here than for example in Mecklenburg and Brandenburg where over 40% of arable land was redistributed.⁴ Only with the second stage of the land reforms which were carried out as part of denazification measures against farmers with up to 100 hectares and which lasted until 1950, did the proportion of those affected increase significantly. With a steady influx of refugees and expelled Germans from the former eastern territories into Thuringia after the war (albeit in fewer numbers than in most of the rest of the GDR), a large proportion of rural communities were required to accommodate the newcomers.⁵ As recent work on the fates of the so-called "*Umsiedler*" in the GDR has shown, a relatively small proportion of these newcomers were able to benefit from the land reforms and become so called *Neubauern*.⁶ Rather the vast majority of newcomers to rural communities found initial employment as agricultural labourers, replacing the foreign workers and prisoners of war who had been freed on the collapse of the Nazi regime and making up for the absence of the generations of young men killed during the war. Many of those employed in this way had however no experience of farming nor saw their long-term future in agriculture, hoping either for a return to their homeland or at least employment in their former trades. Even those who had sought and received land as part of the land reforms found in many cases that it did not enable them to make a sufficient living – not least because the quality of the land and

² Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik, Bezirksstelle Erfurt, *Statistisches Jahrbuch: Bezirk Erfurt, 1970*, Vol I p.3.

³ Bauer, T. *Blockpartei und Agrarrevolution von Oben. Die DBD 1948-1963* (Munich 2003), p.33.

⁴ Kaiser, J-C, 'Klientelbildung und Formierung einer neuen politischen Kultur. Überlegungen zur Geschichte der Bodenreform in Thüringen' in Bauerkämper, A. (ed.) *Junkerland in Bauernhand* (Stuttgart 1996) pp.119-131.

⁵ Schwartz, M., 'Vertrieben in die Arbeiterschaft "Umsiedler" als "Arbeiter" in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1952' in P. Hübner/K. Tenfelde (eds.) *Arbeiter in der SBZ/DDR* (Essen 1999) pp.81-128 here p.82.

⁶ Schwartz, M., *Vertriebene und Umsiedlerpolitik* (Munich 2004) p.1144.

the livestock which they were allocated was seldom of the best.⁷ Consequently over the course of late 1940s and early 1950s, encouraged by the state, there was a steady exodus from rural communities and agricultural employment into urban settlements and industry. The proportion of newcomers among landless labourers, which had been nearly 50% for the GDR as a whole in 1949 (though far lower in Thuringia), was thus greatly reduced by the time the collectivisation of agriculture was underway.⁸ (Statistics ceased to be collected on *Umsiedler* from 1952 onwards making it difficult to ascertain just how many remained in agricultural employment and settled in rural communities.⁹) For the majority of farmers in *Bezirk* Erfurt, therefore, vigorous attempts to persuade them to collectivise in the 1950s represented the first major disruption to the organisation of farm land as a result of communist control since the war.

Of course conditions for farming in the *Bezirk* varied considerably. Purely in terms of the nature and quality of the land, the *Bezirk* may be divided into three basic sections. Firstly the flat fertile arable lands of the Thuringian basin which included parts of the districts of Weimar, Bad Langensalza, Sömmerda, Erfurt-Land and Apolda. Farms in these areas tended to be the most successful with high yields of crops and correspondingly well fed livestock. As a consequence those who farmed them could on the whole afford to remain full-time farmers. Secondly the highlands in the north of the *Bezirk* which included much of the districts of Worbis, Heiligenstadt and Nordhausen. These areas in contrast had a much smaller proportion of arable land, relying heavily on pasture land for livestock feed. Owing to the relative poverty of farming in this part of the country, there was a long tradition of migration by men looking for work in mining and industry as well as on farms and estates elsewhere, leaving large numbers of small-scale farms (most well under 5 hectares) in the hands of women and the elderly. Similarly to the far south of the *Bezirk*, in the southernmost parts of Arnstadt, Eisenach and Gotha districts the beginnings of the hilly Thuringian forests reduced agricultural production to a minimum. Much of the rest of these districts however constituted a third section, along with districts such as Mühlhausen

⁷ Schwartz, M., *Vertriebene und Umsiedlerpolitik* (Munich 2004) p.1146.

⁸ Schwartz, M., 'Vertrieben in die Arbeiterschaft "Umsiedler" als "Arbeiter" in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1952' in P. Hübner/K. Tenfelde (eds.) *Arbeiter in der SBZ/DDR* (Essen 1999) pp. 81-128 here p.126.

⁹ Schwartz, M., 'Vertrieben in die Arbeiterschaft "Umsiedler" als "Arbeiter" in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1952' in P. Hübner/K. Tenfelde (eds.) *Arbeiter in der SBZ/DDR* (Essen 1999) pp.81-128 here p.90.

and Sondershausen in which relatively successful farmers each with between 10 and 20 hectares of land predominated.¹⁰

The pattern of urban settlement and the development of industry within the different districts also varied considerably and inevitably made an impact on the nature of rural communities and agricultural activity. With the hardening division of Germany following the war, the pre-war economic structure of what had become the Soviet zone could no longer be maintained. It was essential that the exploitation of native raw materials be stepped up and new heavy industry as well as manufacturing be developed in the GDR. As a consequence during East Germany's own (less flamboyant) economic miracle in the 1950s, a rapid expansion of industry and urban settlement took place which not only drew on the agricultural workforce (as I have mentioned with regard to *Umsiedler*) but on agricultural land as cities expanded and incorporated rural areas. Moreover some rural communities began to lose their dominantly agricultural character, by their proximity to industrial centres and the high proportion of commuting members of the industrial workforce. With the further expansion of industry into previously exclusively rural areas and the growth of the commuting population, the combination of small-scale agriculture with industrial employment accounted for a not insignificant proportion of farming in some districts in the 1950s. In *Bezirk* Erfurt in the vicinity of the many small towns in the Gotha and Eisenach districts in particular there was a tradition of part-time farmers and smallholders who also worked in industry. The expansion of mining operations, particularly the potash mines in Nordhausen, had a similar impact on the surrounding rural communities which supplied much of the workforce.

While progress in industrialisation during the 1960s and 1970s alongside the mechanisation of agriculture did result in a reduction in the numbers living in small rural settlements in conjunction with the drop in the agricultural workforce, a considerable number of people in the *Bezirk* continued to commute from villages.¹¹ Thus although the agricultural and food production sectors dominated the economies of certain *Kreise* such as Bad Langensalza, Weimar-Land and Erfurt-Land a large proportion of the inhabitants

¹⁰ For information on the structure of farming in Thuringia see: Breitschuh, G. et al. *Thüringer Landwirtschaft zwischen 2. Weltkrieg und Wiedervereinigung* (Jena 1999); more specifically for *Bezirk* Erfurt: Augusten, F. *Die Organisation der Rinderzucht im Bezirk Erfurt von 1945 bis 1989* (Aachen 1997).

¹¹ Rauch, B. 'Der *Bezirk* Erfurt' in Best, H. & Mestrup, H. (eds.) *Die Ersten und die Zweiten Sekretäre der SED: Machtstrukturen und Herrschaftspraxis in den thüringischen Bezirken der DDR* (Weimar 2003), pp.31-39.

of these areas were employed in industrial centres, notably in Sömmerda and Erfurt. The largest factories in the *Bezirk*, such as the Office Machine Works Sömmerda, VEB Automotive Works Eisenach and VEB Electric Works Erfurt, operated largely in the manufacture of machinery and vehicles and from the 1970s electrical goods and technology. Elsewhere in the *Bezirk* textile and chemical industries were developed, such as the VEB Chemicals Rudisleben near Arnstadt and the VEB Cotton Weaving Leinefeld in Worbis district.¹² In 1971 of approximately 600,000 employees in the *Bezirk*, 14.5% worked in agriculture and 38% worked in industry. The numbers of those in the *Bezirk* working in agriculture in the 1970s continued to drop – albeit more gradually than during the 1960s. By the beginning of the 1980s, the size of the agricultural workforce in the *Bezirk*, as in the rest of the GDR, did however stabilise, as the minimum level of manpower required to sustain production was reached.

New recruits to the LPGs in *Bezirk* Erfurt in the 1970s joined farms much changed since full collectivisation in 1960, which were nevertheless by no means uniform in size, structure and organisation. By the 1980s a peculiarly socialist modernisation and (mis-) industrialisation of farming had taken place in the GDR. How this process occurred in the specific, yet not wholly unrepresentative, circumstances of the territory of *Bezirk* Erfurt and the impact it had on working and living conditions for the rural population forms the background to the shifting relations between state and society with which this thesis is concerned.

Pre-1989 Studies of Agriculture and Rural Society in the GDR

Given the declining status of farming within the economies of Europe's industrialised countries and the proportionate growth of the urban population, the attention of historians of post-war Europe in general has shifted proportionately away from the development of rural society.¹³ Nevertheless the significance and immediacy of the upheavals in rural society in the Soviet zone of occupation in Germany after World War II and then the GDR has made it something of an exception in this regard. The social development of the

¹² Mestrup, H. *Die SED – Ideologischer Anspruch, Herrschaftspraxis und Konflikte in Bezirk Erfurt 1971-1989* (Weimar 2000) pp.104-127.

¹³ This suggestion has been made with regard to the work of sociologists and anthropologists: Giordano, Ch. 'die vergessenen Bauern. Agrarwissenschaften als Objekt sozialwissenschaftlicher Amnesie' in Giordano Ch. und Hettlage, R. (eds.) *Bauerngemeinschaften im Industriezeitalter. Zur Rekonstruktion ländlicher Lebensformen* (W.Berlin 1989) pp.9-27, here p.9.

countryside as well as the politics of agriculture in the Soviet Zone and GDR were the subject of interest in the West from the beginnings of the land reform in 1945 and the first drive for collectivisation of agriculture in the early 1950s, provoked in part by the immediate plight of the steady flow of farmers and landowners fleeing the GDR as a result. Equally the significance of the transformation of the countryside for the SED regime, both in terms of the ideological battle for the rural population and in terms of its goals of autarkic food production saw a large number of historical and political works published in the GDR itself in clarification as well as justification of socialist agricultural policy. Literature has thus come from a number of different quarters in both east and west with works by historians and journalists, as well as social scientists alongside more technical literature on specific agricultural issues.

A range of different types of studies was produced in East Germany prior to the *Wende* on the subject of agriculture, village development and collective farm management. While much of the content is formulaic and ridden with ideological jargon, there was scope too for debates on the future direction of agriculture, particularly during the 1960s, amid a climate of innovation generated by the new economic policy and with the exact path of development for the farm collectives not yet fixed. The scale and complexity of agriculture and (would-be) autarkic food production in a planned economy raised numerous questions for debate among agricultural scholars as well as economists and theorists of socialist management. While the more accessible works on these subjects often did not necessarily reflect the real problems of the average farming collective, they and other more technical publications nonetheless highlight the potential for debate, albeit within certain bounds.¹⁴

A number of works published in the late 1960s and 1970s in the GDR addressed the progress of village development, triumphantly highlighting the success of the policy of “*Annäherung*” (“converging”) of living standards in villages and towns with examples of modern housing in rural areas and the availability of modern urban amenities in the countryside.¹⁵ Alongside these largely superficial analyses, several sociological studies of

¹⁴Schütze, W. *Investitionsfinanzierung der LPG* (Berlin: Staatsverlag 1966); Polsfuss, W. “Die Aufgaben der Kreislandwirtschaftsräte und ihrer Produktionsleitungen bei der Planung des wissenschaftlich-technischen Fortschritts in der Landwirtschaft” in Egler, G et al (eds.) pp.208-231 *Zum NÖS in der Landwirtschaft* (Berlin 1965); Heuer, K. *Genossenschaftliche Demokratie als Führungsaufgabe. Rechtsfragen der Leitung der LPG und der Beziehungen zur Kooperationsgemeinschaft* (Berlin, 1968).

¹⁵Grünberg, H. *Die sozialistische Wandlung des Dorfes* (Berlin 1970); Hanke, H. *Kultur und Lebensweise im sozialistischen Dorf* (Berlin 1967).

aspects of rural society were carried out in the 1970s and 1980s, largely under the direction of Kurt Krambach.¹⁶ While again couched in the rhetoric of progress, these nonetheless looked more closely at the specific issues facing rural society such as the problem of the loss of young people to the towns and often used interesting, if ideologically skewed, questionnaires to gauge the opinions of farmers on the latest developments of agricultural policy and the position of the farmer within the collective.

The development in the 1970s of the large industrial specialised production units in some advanced LPGs also prompted interest from journalists within the GDR. The reportage on life and work in the industrial milking station in Berlstedt, *Kreis* Weimar by Ursula Püschel, a cultural functionary and literary critic, is notable for the mixture of workers' and managers' perspectives on problems and successes which she portrays.¹⁷ More controversially, the recorded testimonies of workers and managers in the specialised fruit farms of the Havelland in *Bezirk* Potsdam edited by Gabrielle Eckart in the 1980s highlighted the everyday problems faced by a range of different people living and working in a rural area since the development of specialised industrial agricultural production.¹⁸ Both these works were published in West Germany in the 1980s filling a gap in West German conceptions of the state of East German agriculture.

The focus of most western studies of East German agriculture and society before the *Wende* concentrated on the period of the land reforms after 1945 and the later process of collectivisation.¹⁹ In the 1950s and 1960s, this was to some extent the natural result of the cold-war ideological division, with the emphasis on the 'totalitarian' control and repression exerted on the German population by the SED regime. With the thawing of relations between east and west from the early 1970s, a number of western analysts began to examine the current state of development in the GDR with a more favourable predisposition. As a result analytical works on the functioning of the LPGs and the development of specialisation and industrial style production were published, which

¹⁶ Krambach, K. et al. (Autorenkollektiv), *Genossenschaftsbauer – Verantwortung – Bewusstsein* (Berlin 1973); Krambach, K. et al. (Autorenkollektiv) *Wie lebt man auf dem Dorf? Soziologische Aspekte der Entwicklung des Dorfes in der DDR* (Berlin 1985).

¹⁷ Püschel, U. *Unterwegs in meinen Dörfern* (Rostock 1982).

¹⁸ Eckart, G. *So sehe ich die Sache – Protokolle aus der DDR. Leben im Havelländischen Obstanbaugebiet* (Cologne 1984).

¹⁹ For examples at the two ends of the period of the GDR's existence, see Kramer, M et al. (eds.), *Die Landwirtschaft in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone : die Entwicklung in den Jahren 1945-1955* (Bonn, 1957); Krebs, Ch., *Der Weg zur industriemässigen Organisation der Agrarproduktion in der DDR – Die Agrarpolitik der SED 1945-1960* (Bonn 1989).

presented a more positive picture of agriculture than had hitherto been produced.²⁰ The direction of agricultural policy in the GDR towards larger scale production units was contrasted favourably with the limited small-scale family farms which still predominated in West Germany.²¹ Enthusiasm for the socialist model was however tempered by the 1980s as it failed to prove more efficient when compared with the continuing superiority of West German agricultural production levels. Furthermore the social and environmental impact of the extreme extent of specialisation of agriculture in the GDR made for further points of criticism.²² Although in many respects accurate, ultimately all Western analyses of the contemporary state of agriculture in the GDR were largely limited to the information provided by party-approved sources – making debates in West Germany on the success or not of the East German transformation of the countryside as much a matter of opinion as evidence.²³

The Historiography of Agriculture and Rural Society in the GDR since the *Wende*

During the early 1990s political divisions continued to find a reflection in analyses of the effects of the *Wende* on rural society and the future of agricultural organisation in the new Germany. Competing evaluations of the morality as well as the practical validity of the collective farming model were made, as particularly east German commentators sought to reassert the positive impact on rural society of the development of the LPG and the relative success of agriculture in the GDR compared with the rest of the economy against criticism from west German academics and renewed interest in the land reforms and the forced collectivisation.²⁴ Since the collapse of the GDR and the reunification of Germany, historical as well as journalistic debate on agricultural policy and rural society in the GDR

²⁰ Dreessen, K., *Die Bedeutung der landwirtschaftlichen Produktionsgenossenschaften für die DDR* (Stuttgart 1973); Bajaja V. *Landwirtschaftliche Grossunternehmer in der DDR* (W. Berlin 1978).

²¹ Hartmann, T. *Die Kooperation in der sozialistischen Landwirtschaft der DDR* (W. Berlin 1971); Immler, H. *Agrarpolitik in der DDR* (Cologne 1971); Thieme, H.J. *Die sozialistische Agrarverfassung der DDR* (Stuttgart 1969).

²² Hohmann, K., "Die Industrialisierung der Landwirtschaft und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Umwelt in der DDR", in Haendcke-Hoppe, M. & Merkel, K. (eds.), *Umweltschutz in beiden Teilen Deutschlands* (W. Berlin 1985); see also for comment, Kluge, U. 'Die "sozialistische Landwirtschaft" als Thema wissenschaftlicher Forschung' in Kluge/Halder/Schlenker *Zwischen Bodenreform und Kollektivierung* (Berlin? 2001) p.16.

²³ Kluge, U. 'Die "sozialistische Landwirtschaft" als Thema wissenschaftlicher Forschung' in Kluge/Halder/Schlenker *Zwischen Bodenreform und Kollektivierung* (Berlin 2001) p.15: "Die Hauptschwäche westdeutscher Analysen ergab sich aus dem Mangel an nachprüfbar Daten aus der DDR-Statistik. Die Geheimniskrämerei von SED Staats- und Parteiführung bescherte der westdeutschen DDR-Forschung ein hohes Mass an Informationsunsicherheit."

²⁴ For an explanation of the some of the conflicts see: Busse, T. *Melken und Gemolken Werden. Die ostdeutsche Landwirtschaft nach der Wende* (Berlin 2001). For different sides of the argument see: Luft, H. "Von der LPG zur Agrargenossenschaft: Eine positive Entwicklung?" in Bollinger, S. & Vilmar, F. (eds.) pp.206-225 *Die DDR war anders* (Berlin 2002); Kuntsche, S. "Die Umgestaltung der Eigentumsverhältnisse und der Produktionsstruktur in der Landwirtschaft" in Keller, D. et al. (eds.) *Ansichten zur Geschichte der DDR Vol. 1* (Bonn 1993) pp. 204-209; Weber, A. "Usachen und Folgen abnehmender Effizienz in der DDR Landwirtschaft" in *Die Endzeit der DDR Wirtschaft* (Opladen 1989) pp. 221-269.

has however primarily focused again on the land reforms and the development of collectivisation in the 1950s and early 1960s. Amid ongoing disputes over land ownership and claims for compensation from both east and west Germans much journalistic interest was provoked by the chance to re-examine the issues of expropriation and forced collectivisation as part of the process of coming to terms with the legacy of the SED dictatorship in the countryside. Against this background, historians too have focused on re-examining the earlier periods of agricultural development in the GDR. As Ulrich Kluge wrote in 2001, “no phase of development in GDR agriculture has been so closely investigated as the initial years 1945/49 up to the conclusion of collectivisation in the early 1960s. Almost three decades are sinking into oblivion. Only the un-extinguished claims for land and farm property from farmers who fled to the west under the pressure of political coercion made headlines after reunification, which agricultural studies then took up, presented and evaluated.”²⁵

Taking the opportunity to use newly available archival sources, several historians have re-examined the structure and organisation of agriculture and the impact of agricultural policy on rural society in the post-war period and under the SED dictatorship up to the early 1960s.²⁶ Looking broadly at agricultural development and SED policy, particularly Arnd Bauerkämper has re-examined the processes of land reform and collectivisation in northern East Germany using archival sources to assess primarily the balance between the continuity of traditional social structures and the consequences of (forced) socialist modernity in rural society and farming.²⁷ Jens Schöne too has provided new insights into the development of the policy of collectivisation during the 1950s,²⁸ while new archival research by Theresia Bauer on the development of the German

²⁵ Kluge, U. ‘Rezension: *Blockpartei und Agrarrevolution von Oben. Die DBD 1948-1963*...’: “Keine Entwicklungsphase der DDR-Landwirtschaft ist so genau untersucht worden wie die Anfangszeit 1945/49 bis zum Abschluss der Kollektivierung in den frühen sechziger Jahren. Fast drei Jahrzehnte versinken in Vergessenheit. Nur der nie erloschene Anspruch auf Boden und Hofeigentum von Bauern, die unter dem Druck politischer Zwangsmassnahmen in den Westen geflüchtet sind, machte nach der Wiedervereinigung 1990 Schlagzeilen, die die Agrarwissenschaft aufnahm, darstellte und beurteilte.” in *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* Heft 1 Jahrgang 53 (2005) pp.131-133 here p.131.

²⁶ For example the contributions in Bauerkämper, A. (eds.) *Junkerland in Bauernhand* (Stuttgart 1996) as well as Osmond, J. “Kontinuität und Konflikt in der Landwirtschaft der SBZ/DDR zur Zeit der Bodenreform und der Vergenossenschaftlichung, 1945-1961” in Richard Bessel, Ralph Jessen (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen 1996) p.137-169, and Bauerkämper A., “Die Neubauern in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1952. Bodenreform und politisch induzierter Wandel der ländlichen Gesellschaft” in Richard Bessel, Ralph Jessen (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen 1996) pp.108-136, and Christel Nehrig in numerous articles – Nehrig, C. ‘Industriearbeit im Dörflichen Milieu. Eine Studie zur Sozialgeschichte der Niederlausitzer Nebenerwerbsbauern 1945 bis 1965’ in Peter Hübner (ed.) *Niederlausitzer Industriearbeiter 1935-1970. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1995) pp.167-191; ‘Das Leben auf dem Lande: Die Genossenschaften’ in Badstübner E.(ed.) *Leben in der DDR – Befremdlich Anders* (Berlin 2000) pp.195-218.

²⁷ Bauerkämper, A. *Ländliche Gesellschaft in der kommunistischen Diktatur: Zwangsmodernisierung und Tradition in Brandenburg 1945-1963* (Weimar 2002).

²⁸ Schöne, J *Frühling auf dem Lande? Die Kollektivierung der DDR Landwirtschaft* (Berlin 2005).

Farmers' Party (*Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands* or DBD) up to 1963 has illuminated the functions and attitudes of party members at the grassroots during the process of collectivisation.²⁹ Specifically with regard to *Bezirk* Erfurt a collection of excerpts from documents detailing the collectivisation process in each of the districts of the *Bezirk* has been compiled by Jürgen Gruhle providing interesting source material for the activities of party and state functionaries at local and regional level in the administration of agriculture in the 1950s – if little actual analysis.³⁰

In comparison analyses of agriculture and rural society post full collectivisation are relatively few in number. Specific aspects have received some examination by social historians. For example Dagmar Langenhahn and Sabine Roß have written on the patterns of qualification attainment and career advancement for women farmers in the 1970s and 1980s.³¹ Thomas Lindenberger has written on the local police constables' involvement in overseeing agricultural transformation in the 1950s and 1960s; Patrice Poutrus has written on the phenomenon of the "Goldbroiler" roast chicken, as part of a growing consumer culture in the 1970s and 1980s for which industrial-scale agricultural production was essential; and Christel Nehrig has addressed the changing position of the chairmen of state-owned farms up to 1970.³² A number of studies of individual villages in the GDR have also dealt with the combination of influences of modernisation and invasive party policy on the peculiar traditions of the rural milieu after collectivisation. Daphne Berdahl's anthropological study of a Catholic border village in the Eichsfeld while focusing primarily on the experience of transition following the *Wende* retells her subjects' retrospective understanding of life between duty as Catholics and as GDR citizens in a highly sensitive region during the latter course of the GDR.³³ Barbara Schier's study of the village of Merxleben between 1945 and 1990, reconstructs elements of everyday life in the village as well as analysing the socio-economic effects of SED agricultural policy over this period in order to contrast the reality with the socialist ideal of "a village community of an historically new type". Schier, on the basis of extensive

²⁹ Bauer, T. *Blockpartei und Agrarrevolution von Oben. Die DBD 1948-1963* (Munich 2003).

³⁰ Gruhle, J. *Ohne Gott und Sonnenschein* (Nauendorf 2000).

³¹ Rosz, S & Langenhahn, D. 'Berufskarrieren von Frauen' in Hornbostel, S. *Sozialistische Eliten. Horizontale und Vertikale Differenzierungsmuster in der DDR* (Opladen 1999) pp.147-162.

³² Lindenberger, T. "Der ABV als Landwirt" in Lindenberger, T. (ed.) *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Cologne 1999) pp.167-203; Nehrig C. 'Das Leitungspersonal der VEG 1945-1970' in Peter Hübner (ed.) *Eliten im Sozialismus, Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Cologne 1999) pp.309-324; Poutrus, P. *Das Phänomen der Goldbroiler in der DDR* (Berlin 2002).

³³ Berdahl, D. *Where the World Ended* (Berkeley 1999).

interviews with villagers and LPG members, also provides analysis of the functioning of the LPG caught between its special status as a model collective and its own internal conflicts, particularly in the early years of its development.³⁴ Antonia Maria Humm's more limited study of the village of Niederrimmern (in comparison with a similar village in West Germany) between 1952 and 1969, demonstrates the complex relationship between some aspects of SED policy and the response to its implementation within the village and the LPG. She also provides some insights into the functioning of the local government in the village and other local socialist organisations, which go beyond much of the available literature on the subject of political institutions at and below district level.³⁵

With specific regard to the development of socialist agricultural policy and rural society since the end of the collectivisation campaign, there have however been few convincing in-depth studies which make satisfactory use of archival sources now available.³⁶ Many of the most interesting works on the subject of agriculture in the GDR in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s published since the *Wende* are the accounts by former LPG members and functionaries of the development of their LPG and their experiences as collective farmers. While one must be careful to see such accounts in the context of developments since the *Wende*, they need not be dismissed as valueless.³⁷ With regard to Thuringia, Manfred Kipping's local history of the Farmers in Oberwiera, 1945–1990 provides some interesting insights into his experience as an LPG functionary amid the constrictions of SED policy on cooperation and specialisation.³⁸ Similarly the history of agriculture in Worbis district by a former LPG chairman, Dr. Heinrich Klose, provides an outline of local agricultural development as well as some impression of his own experiences as an LPG chairman. More broadly a volume published for the Thuringian Interior Ministry gives a methodical overview of the development of agriculture in Thuringia after collectivisation, reaching conclusions as to the technical deficiencies of policy decisions made during the GDR – in particular the problems associated with the

³⁴ Schier, B. *Alltagsleben im "Sozialistischen Dorf"* (Münster 2001).

³⁵ Humm, A.-M. *Auf dem Weg zum sozialistischen Dorf* (Göttingen 1999).

³⁶ Comments by Jens Schöne citing Gabler, D. *Entwicklungsetappen in der Geschichte der Landwirtschaft der DDR* (Berlin 1995), aptly describe the current historiographical situation: "Vorliegende Gesamtdarstellungen...vermögen inhaltlich und methodisch nicht zu überzeugen": Schöne, J., 'Landwirtschaft und Ländliche Gesellschaft in der DDR' in Eppelmann, Faulenbach, Mähler (eds.), *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung* (Paderborn 2003) p.259.

³⁷ Schneider, Chr. *Was bleibt von uns? Bauernstimmen* (Bautzen 1991) - e.g., although stylised, the accounts here are nonetheless instructive on the tensions and concerns faced by LPG members during the transformation of GDR agriculture.

³⁸ Kipping, M. *Die Bauern in Oberwiera: Landwirtschaft im Sächsisch-Thüringischen 1945 bis 1990* (Beucha 1999).

over-expansion of the farming units. The particular value of this book is however the transcribed interviews with former LPG functionaries which it contains.³⁹

There are thus some considerable gaps in the research done since the *Wende* on SED agricultural policy and the development of rural society in the GDR from the mid 1960s onwards, which with this thesis I hope to fill. Articles by Christel Nehrig and in particular Dagmar Langenhahn in recent years have raised some of the questions which have yet to be thoroughly addressed with regard to the structure, formation and changing organisation of LPGs and the implementation of SED agricultural policy through the later 1960s and 1970s. Langenhahn for example most recently has written on the position of leading agricultural functionaries in the 1970s as they responded to the problems of cooperation between LPGs and the separation of crop and livestock production. More than anything however these articles highlight the need for greater research in precisely these areas.⁴⁰

The process of consolidation of LPGs, the development of cooperation, industrialisation and specialisation in agriculture as they transformed the working conditions of farmers and affected the living conditions of rural communities are essential to a complete picture of the workings of the SED regime and the stability as well as the failure of the GDR. The day-to-day working of the collective farms – the experience of “collective democracy” within the LPG, the reception of and reaction to SED agricultural policy by collective farmers and in particular the pivotal role of LPG functionaries in the dual transmission of authority and information – needs to be more definitively assessed as it varied over time. Investigation into the structures of authority in the administration of agriculture and rural communities via the bureaucracies of state and party and the significance of the presence or absence of strong SED groups in rural areas versus those of other bloc parties are essential to understanding a large proportion of the politics, economics and society of the GDR. In order to gain an effective view of the network of institutions and influences shaping agriculture and rural society, this thesis offers a limited

³⁹ Breitschuh, G. et al. *Thüringer Landwirtschaft zwischen 2. Weltkrieg und Wiedervereinigung* (Jena 1999).

⁴⁰ Langenhahn, D. ‘Machtbildung und forcierter Strukturwandel in der Landwirtschaft der DDR der 1970er Jahre’ in *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* Heft 2 (2003) pp.47-56; ‘Auf dem Weg zur genossenschaftlichen Demokratie?’ in Hürtgen, R. & Reichel, T. (eds.) *Der Schein der Stabilität. DDR Betriebsalltag in der Ära Honecker* (Berlin 2001) pp.263-274; Nehrig, C. ‘Das Leben auf dem Lande’ in Badstübner E. (ed.) *Leben in der DDR – Befremdlich Anders* (Berlin 2000) pp.195-218.

regional study aiming thereby to go beyond the specific intricacies of a study of a single LPG or village, yet retaining a focus on the grassroots of state and society.

Sources

My sources for this thesis come predominantly from the archives of a range of institutions concerned with rural affairs at different levels of the party and state hierarchies. My intention is both to gain a closer perspective on the functioning of the regime at the grassroots within one *Bezirk* and to develop an understanding of the process of policy implementation and information transfer within the various administrative hierarchies from the regions to the centre. Consequently the bulk of my sources come from the level of the *Bezirk* and *Kreis* administrations which played a naturally key role in the transmission of information and the process of policy implementation between the centre and the regions. Nevertheless I have examined too the files of the various figures and institutions with an influence over the development of rural affairs at a national level on the one hand and on the other the documents of individual LPGs – primarily the minutes of board meetings and members’ assemblies – and of individual SED party organisations.

In accordance with my intention to gain a picture of the experience of “ordinary” East Germans and the low-level functionaries operating primarily in the LPGs and other institutions at a local level, I have paid particular attention too to those sources which highlight local concerns. Thus alongside general mood and opinion reports compiled by the *Bezirksleitung* of the SED, the *Bezirksvorstand* of the DBD and the *Rat des Bezirkes* (among others), I have used the files of district state and party administrations as well as samples of *Eingaben der Bevölkerung* (People’s Petitions) and reports on public village meetings. Where possible I have used police, Stasi and SED Party Control Commission reports as evidence not only of state and party discipline and law enforcement methods but also as sources describing local circumstances. With these as with the other archival sources I have sought where possible to balance statistical evidence with evidence of contemporary opinion among the rural population. In addition I have carried out a number of oral history interviews with former functionaries in LPGs as well as in the *Kreis* and *Bezirk* administrations of party and state which have provided invaluable explanations for some finer points of state and party policy as well as farmers’ responses to the same.

Dealing with the documents of a vast bureaucracy, one has to be aware that even if one examines a vast quantity of documentary evidence, there is nonetheless considerable room for a distorted picture to be presented, in which minor concerns take on a greater significance in the surviving sources, or in which the concerns of the bureaucrats are unrepresentative of the concerns of those with whom they are dealing. Nonetheless this in itself is revealing of the manner in which the bureaucracy functions and the relationship between the various operatives of the regime, those above and below them in the hierarchy and their relationship with the system and the society which they served. The documents of the system – in their falsehoods, vagueness or accuracy – provide in themselves valuable insight into the manner in which the administration functioned and the tensions within it. There is no doubt that there is a regularisation of the bureaucracy involved in running collectivised agriculture in the planned economy which is visible in the style as well as content of the sources. There are advantages and disadvantages to the historian in this respect. Documents of the late 1950s and early 1960s, particularly in the LPGs and at the lowest levels of the party and state bureaucracy are often more revealing as a result of their lack of ideological polish or formulaic content. By the same token the increasing competence of the report writers in the 1970s and 1980s, in their selection of information and its presentation within a fixed ideological framework, compromises the value of the document as a source for the event or the issue under discussion. Nonetheless the value of earlier reports as descriptions of actual events or circumstances may be compromised too by the sheer inconsistency of the picture presented and by gaps in the information provided. By contrast, later sources are often more comprehensive in the extent – if not the depth – of information they impart.

As to the reliability of the sources, it must be taken into account that there is considerable potential for the statistical information offered in certain documents to be inaccurate. The importance of presenting an image of progress to the world certainly was apparent in presentation of statistics to the international community. The accuracy of internal statistics and indeed reports requires some consideration however too. There was good reason to falsify, under- or overstate at various levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy, from the LPG right up to the State Planning Commission (*Staatliche Planungskommission* or SPK). Nonetheless the administration of agriculture relied heavily on the collation of

accurate statistical information: for the system to have functioned at all, there must have been some accuracy in the reporting. In most respects the statistical analyses of the problems in agriculture in the GDR (if not the actual figures) are borne out by alternative sources – such as the complaints of the farmers or villagers in *Eingaben* or the mood reports of the police, *Stasi* as well as the SED and DBD party organisations.

With regard to the mood reports and analyses of popular opinion among farmers, there is considerable variation in the degree of scepticism which needs to be applied, depending on the time and reference points of the document. There are long lists in the files of statements of gushing support for the SED, for Walter Ulbricht as well as his successor as the leading figure in the SED regime, Erich Honecker or for particular policies or achievements of the GDR or the Soviet Union. Many of these include quotes from farmers or LPG functionaries. I have tended to exclude such declarations of opinion as reliable sources of popular attitudes, not on the basis that no such opinions were ever expressed but on the basis that they present an artificially sanitised response to the SED regime. Many other analyses of opinions among farmers were also clearly sanitised to some extent. The coherence and complexity of arguments opposed to SED agricultural policy are often summarised in single phrases, or reduced to the catch-all notion of “*Unklarheiten*” (“points of uncertainty/confusion”). In this respect analyses referring to specific circumstances (*Eingaben*, party control commission/police/*Stasi* investigations, individual LPG documents/party organisation documents) are useful in giving examples of the possible broader individual/local concerns surrounding common complaints. Analyses by state functionaries, as well as the DBD and the SED, are consistently vague in many respects. Opinions among farmers for example are often attributed variously to gradations of “a few”, “some...and others” or “many” without the actual scale becoming entirely clear. I have found it expedient to reproduce these classifications myself, backing them where possible with statistical evidence. There was undoubtedly misreporting, intentional and unintentional, to go along with the vagueness and ideologically motivated distortion of information. Nonetheless, with due awareness for the possible flaws of individual documents, the quantity and quality of evidence available is capable of providing a reasonably comprehensive picture of the concerns of both farmers and functionaries.

Such was the wealth of as yet unexamined documentary evidence available that, owing to time constraints, I was unable to analyse (as much as I would have wished) the files of the complete range of agricultural institutions other than the LPGs. For the same reason, my analysis focuses too on the agricultural elements of rural society, rather than village life as a whole. These remain topics requiring further research.

Contribution

The contribution of this thesis to the body of literature on the history of the GDR is two-fold. On the one hand it provides an insight into the process of agricultural development in the GDR during the 1960s and 1970s at the grassroots which has been largely absent from the historiography thus far. On the other it offers a new perspective on the long-standing debates over the relationship between state and society in the GDR, seeking to highlight the long-term processes by which the SED regime attained stability in the 1970s but was increasingly vulnerable to economic decline in the 1980s.

Since the collapse of the GDR numerous attempts have been made to characterise the dictatorship and the relationship between state and society. In the immediate aftermath of the “velvet revolution” of 1989, the concept of totalitarianism was resurrected by many observers and despite having been abandoned as a useful analytical concept for historians for much of the previous decade, began to be reapplied to the SED dictatorship.⁴¹ The totalitarian concept appears to suit well attempts to explain how things fundamentally were, claiming to explain the complete context in which all lived experience took place. While few users of the totalitarian concept have not accepted that there were limits to the success of the regime’s total claims on society, these claims are seen nonetheless as the benchmark against which anything meaningful can be understood about the society.⁴² However while the totalitarian concept appears to explain all, in doing so it tends to leave much else un-illuminated, making it a barrier against, rather than a tool for, understanding the way things “really” were. Or rather it explains some things better than others: since it is concerned primarily with the projects of rulers, it provides a top-down perspective on

⁴¹ Schroeder, K., *Geschichte und Transformation des SED-Staates* (Berlin 1994).

⁴² Kowalczyk I-S, *Legitimation eines neuen Staates* (Berlin 1997), p. 345; McFalls, L.H. *Communism's Collapse, Democracy's Demise* (London 1995), p. 6.: as L.H McFalls has written, “...theories of communism’s evolution and revolutionary end have, in fact, merely elaborated on one or more of the three possible sources of change that the classic theories of totalitarianism identified: international competition, ideological and institutional erosion and corruption, or societal resistance.”

the ruled and the relationship between ruler and ruled, where other perspectives might give rise to a more differentiated picture.

Since the mid 1990s increasing numbers of historians of the GDR have found totalitarianism inadequate as a theoretical framework in which to position their research on the complex relationship between state and society. Certainly the SED regime had aspirations to total control over the population, seeking in theory to develop the socialist personality and infiltrate all aspects of society. However recognition of these aspirations does not satisfactorily explain the variety and complexity of the relationships within and between the SED party hierarchy, the state and economic administrative apparatus and the citizens of the GDR over the forty years of its existence.

Alternative characterisations of the dictatorship have drawn upon arguably less rigidly prescriptive concepts, working outside the discourse of implied comparison with (western) democratic rule. All too often these have however fundamentally replicated the top-down totalitarian perspective.⁴³ A significant strand of arguments has sought to point out the limits of the SED dictatorship. Among others Ralph Jessen and Richard Bessel have argued that “looking more closely it could prove to be the case, that many of the peculiarities of east German history between 1945 and 1989 may only be explained, once there is success in describing the complicated interaction between the total claim of the dictatorship and the conditions of the environment which acted upon it – in part created by but not always controlled by the dictatorship itself.”⁴⁴ Not dissimilarly Detlef Pollack has argued in opposition to the notion of an homogenous “shut down society”⁴⁵ that the limits of the SED’s control were such that all attempts to homogenise society were bound to come up against barriers from within society which then shaped future policies (e.g. the hardness of traditional structures and milieus, the formation of networks of informal relations, loss of belief in the value of progress, the counter-productive consequences of state repression).⁴⁶

⁴³ For example Konrad Jarausch’s description of the GDR as a modern welfare dictatorship in Konrad Jarausch (ed.), ‘Care and Coercion: the GDR as Welfare Dictatorship’, in Konrad Jarausch (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 47-69.

⁴⁴ Bessel, R. and Jessen, R. ‘Einleitung: Die Grenzen der Diktatur’, in Richard Bessel, Ralph Jessen (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen 1996), pp.7-23 here p.9.

⁴⁵ Sigrid Meuschel argued that the GDR was a “stillgelegte Gesellschaft” suggesting that the totalitarian expansion of the state resulted in a dying away of society: Meuschel, S. *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR, Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main 1992) ‘Überlegungen zu einer Herrschafts- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR’ in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 19 (1993) pp.5-14.

⁴⁶ Pollack, D. ‘Die Konstitutive Widersprüchlichkeit der DDR’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24 (1998), pp.110-131.

Attempts have been made also however to characterise the interrelations of state and society within the GDR focusing on the practice of authority within society. The ideas of *Herrschaft als sozialer Praxis* (“authority as social praxis”) and linked to it the notion of *Eigen-Sinn* (literally “own sense or conception”) have been developed in the context of the GDR in order to escape the top-down perspective by emphasising the interrelations and mutual impact of authority on society and society upon authority at the grassroots.⁴⁷ The artificial distinctions of active ‘rulers’ and passive ‘ruled’ and hence the distinction between oppressive ‘state’ and oppressed ‘society’ are from this perspective complicated by the actual interdependence of dictatorial control and the individual motives and intentions, identities and self-conceptions of those on whom and through whom authority is exerted. Thomas Lindenberger’s use of the term *Eigen-Sinn* has been to illustrate the potential for people in the GDR to use and negotiate with the structures of the regime for their own interests, adapting and changing but also building and sustaining them in the process within a limited local circumstance.⁴⁸

Building on these ideas this thesis seeks to provide an historical analysis of the SED dictatorship, which qualifies the traditional top-down model of the functioning of authority in the dictatorship and a starkly dichotomous view of the state and society. In order to explain how the GDR functioned with regard to agriculture and rural society in practice, it is necessary to examine the internal complexity of the economic, political and administrative structures of the regime at the lower levels of the hierarchy. These structures as they operated at the grassroots over an extended period of time not only controlled and shaped the boundaries in which farmers lived and worked, but were shaped themselves by the integration and participation of people as farmers and agricultural functionaries into the system of rule. Using the example of *Bezirk Erfurt* I shall examine how East Germans responded to the end of private farming by resisting, manipulating but also participating in the new system of rural organisation. In addition I shall attempt to

⁴⁷ Both terms were originally used by Alf Lüdtke in other contexts: Lüdtke, A. “Einleitung: Herrschaft als soziale Praxis”, in Lüdtke, A. (ed.) *Herrschaft als Soziale Praxis. Historische und sozial-anthropologische Studien* (Göttingen 1991) pp.9-63; Lüdtke, A. *Eigen-Sinn, Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus. Ergebnisse* (Hamburg, 1993). But they have since been used in the context of the GDR, most notably by Thomas Lindenberger: Lindenberger, T. “Der ABV als Landwirt” in Thomas Lindenberger (ed.) *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR*, (Cologne 1999) pp.167-203; “Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Das Alltagsleben der DDR und sein Platz in der Erinnerungskultur des vereinigten Deutschlands” in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B40/2000 pp.5-12; *Volkspolizei: Herrschaftspraxis und öffentliche Ordnung im SED Staat, 1952-1968* (Cologne 2003).

⁴⁸ Lindenberger, T. ‘Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung’, in Lindenberger T. (ed.) *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Cologne 1999), pp.13-44.

show how LPG functionaries went about their work operating under as well as with a combination of compromise and material incentive, administrative pressure and physical force. Their relationship with and position within the communities of which they were part provides a new perspective on the interrelations of politics and society, of power, authority and changing agricultural practice in the GDR as it developed economically and technologically. Moreover it offers some insight into the process by which SED authority stabilised in the rural communities in the GDR, yet at the same time became increasingly vulnerable to economic decline.

SECTION 1

Consolidation and Control: Collectivisation and its Malcontents

CHAPTER 1

Steps toward Full Collectivisation of Agriculture

“There was once the Kaiser’s empire, there was once Hitler’s empire and yet everything changed again. We just want to hold on and wait for what’s going on next year!”¹ (One of the farmers’ arguments against joining the LPG when faced with an agitation brigade in the vicinity of Görmar, *Kreis* Mühlhausen in December 1959.)

There is no doubt that despite claiming the title of “the workers **and** peasants state” in 1949 it was the former not the latter who were central to the identity of the GDR as both carriers of the revolution and models of the socialist personality. The extent and depth to which the SED had penetrated rural society was correspondingly limited. The advancement of collective farming during the 1950s was in large part the beginnings of an attempt to remedy this glaring deficiency. The completion of the collectivisation campaign in 1960, while being an administrative success, revealed however just how deficient the permanent structures of control and communication between the SED leadership and rural communities were and how little certainty there was in the countryside of a future under the SED.

During the 1950s, the campaign for collectivisation of agriculture sought to undertake the most radical transformation of the conditions of rural existence since the land reforms. It entailed a massive mobilisation of the regime’s apparatus for publicising its policies, persuading people of their value and suppressing hostility. In so doing it placed the effectiveness of the local, district and regional administration of agriculture and rural communities under close scrutiny, exposing the extent and limitations of this apparatus. At the same time, with the formation of the new LPGs, collectivisation forced farmers and local functionaries to accept new roles and responsibilities and in so doing began to change the basis on which the SED regime communicated with and transmitted its authority to farmers and rural communities at large. The manner of the campaign, which caused in the short term such fear, anger and hostility towards the SED, had long-

¹ Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar from here on ThHStAW BDVP 20/134 VPKA Mühlhausen, Abt. Schutzpolizei, Ergebnisse der Auswertung der Brigaden innerhalb des MTS-Bereiches Görmar 10.12.1959.

term consequences, setting the parameters within which future policies were conceived, communicated and received in the next decade and beyond.

The Campaign for Collectivisation

The pace of social transformation was far slower in the countryside than it was in the town for a number of reasons. The central role of the church in village life, the complex networks of familial relations in the village, the lack of anonymity and the essential interdependency of the inhabitants of small communities were important factors in preserving the established social order. Moreover the simple geographical isolation of many communities meant the ideological as well as purely organisational capacity for change in the villages was lacking.

By the early 1950s the self-confidence of the SED leadership under Walter Ulbricht had risen sufficiently that it was willing to place more pressure on the population in the implementation of the socialist transformation of society and increased norms of production. At the II. SED Party Congress in 1952 the phase of “the construction of socialism” (*Aufbau des Sozialismus*) was announced and the SED began thus the next step in its socio-economic transformation of the countryside following the land reforms of the post-war period. Having parcelled out the larger estates in the late 1940s, the goal was now to re-establish large-scale production units through the amalgamation of farms into socialist collectives organised according to a uniform pattern. Where before organised cooperation between farmers had been quashed by the SED, material and practical support (and with it state interference) was now given to the spontaneous formation of farming collectives in some selected villages and the SED advanced a campaign for the formation of agricultural collectives more widely, despite the lack of suitable conditions for widespread large-scale collective production.²

Although aspects of the Soviet model were adopted during the drive for collectivisation, this was by no means to be a simple Sovietisation of agriculture since the land brought into the collective remained legally, albeit with numerous restrictions, in the ownership of the farmer, while the range of types of collective farm organisation enabled

² The early development of the LPG in Merxleben as described by Barbara Schier highlights the mixture of local impetus and state interference in the establishment of the very first collective farms. Schier B., *Alltagsleben im “Sozialistischen Dorf”* (Münster 2001) pp.108-151.

farmers to maintain, if they chose, individual control of livestock and/or farm machinery.³ In the LPG Type I only the use of the land was managed in common, in Type II (which soon became all but obsolete) the land, tools and machinery and in Type III the livestock were also included. The majority of farmers however continued to resist collectivisation even as the state offered greater incentives to those who would join - through privileged access to machinery, seed and fertiliser, lifting of debts and extension of credit - and more severe sanctions to those who would or could not - high taxes and the setting of impossibly high production quotas, which effectively meant jail terms and the confiscation of property as punishment for alleged sabotage. Under such duress a large proportion of *Grossbauern* (wealthy farmers: defined as those owning 20 hectares of land or involved in capitalist enterprise) chose flight from the GDR or abandoned their farms during the course of 1952 and 1953, which in turn exacerbated deficiencies in the supply of food to the population.⁴

In the towns, the ultimate results of the more hardline policies of the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* and the increased production norms were the demonstrations of the 17th June 1953. Despite great opposition to the beginnings of a campaign for collectivisation and punitively high production quotas along with false charges of economic sabotage for non-compliant farmers, participation in the uprisings remained limited in the countryside, though not for want of disgruntlement with the state's policies. Notable exceptions in Erfurt were demonstrations and open opposition to the SED led in part by village pastors in Bad Tennstedt, Kreis Langensalza and in Eckolstädt, *Kreis Apolda*, in the latter's case ending only with the deployment of Soviet tanks. In *Bezirk* Erfurt, private farmers were involved too in demonstrations on 17th June in four (out of 13) *Kreisstädte* during which some of those imprisoned during the "class struggle" in the countryside were forcibly released. The most notable of these actions occurred in Mühlhausen where 5000-6000 farmers who had been attending a farmers' assembly in Oberdorla on the 17th marched through the town and occupied the court buildings, demanding the return of a free market and the release of imprisoned farmers.⁵ The 17th June however, while gaining symbolic value (and it continued to be referred to by disgruntled farmers in the *Bezirk* in subsequent

³ Nehrig, C. "Landwirtschaftspolitik" in Andreas Herbst, Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, Jürgen Winkler (eds.) *Die SED. Geschichte – Organisation – Politik. Ein Handbuch*, (Berlin: 1997) pp.294-305 - here p.295.

⁴ Werkentin, F. *Politische Strafjustiz in der Ära Ulbricht* (Berlin 1995) pp. 73-85.

⁵ Kermarrec, P. *Der 17. Juni 1953 im Bezirk Erfurt* (Erfurt 2003) pp. 67-71.

years⁶), was not directly experienced by the vast majority of the rural population. Rather in subsequent months, as the SED implemented the 'New Course' designed to defuse the most serious causes of dissatisfaction among East Germans, farmers took the opportunity to reassert themselves and reverse measures forced upon them. Thus LPG formed under duress disbanded and farmers withdrew to set up independent farms again during 1953. By the following year however pressure and material incentives were again being brought to bear on farmers and farm labourers to form and re-form collective farms.

For much of the 1950s an uneasy situation developed in rural communities. Many LPG remained economically unstable lacking both the quality of land and livestock and the degree of expertise, dedication and social cohesion among members to function efficiently.⁷ Private farmers faced with punitive production quotas found themselves unable to continue in agriculture and in some cases fearing draconian punishments abandoned the GDR altogether. While it is clear that the majority of private farmers in the GDR managed to survive and in many cases even profit from the system of "*freie Spitzen*" ("free peaks": i.e. excess production for which high prices were paid) and production quotas, a basic antagonism remained between much of the rural population and the representatives of the SED regime, demonstrated repeatedly in minor acts of resistance. In June 1957 farmers in *Kreis* Apolda called openly for the return of the free market and the abolition of quotas.⁸ Minor acts of sabotage also took place to undermine the LPG. In early 1958 in an LPG in *Kreis* Mühlhausen for example, several pigs were reported to have been stabbed. The strength of opposition to the LPG in the village meant too that those who joined could be seen as traitors and faced social isolation. Various incidents were reported in which LPG members were insulted and their children bullied. In a case in a village in *Kreis* Gotha, a woman was reportedly spat at while in the village shop for having become a member of the LPG.⁹

Paradoxically more serious for the regime than these episodes of "class conflict", was the lack of class conflict whatsoever in some rural communities, where local party

⁶ ThHStAW BDVP 20/134 Kriminalpolizei, Bericht an die HVDP Fälle über Proklamierung eines neuen 17. Juni. 26.3.1955.

⁷ The trials and tribulations of the LPG in Merxleben described in detail by Barbara Schier are instructive in this regard, bearing in mind that as the first LPG to be set up in the Bezirk, the regime had a vested interest in ensuring its success. Schier B., *Alltagsleben im "Sozialistischen Dorf"* (Münster 2001).

⁸ ThHStAW BDVP 20/044 BDVP, Bericht an die BDVP – Politabteilung, Wahleinsatz im VPKA Apolda und Mährescherwerk Weimar 13.6.1957.

⁹ ThHStAW RdB L1151 Abt. Landwirtschaft: Bericht über den Stand der sozialistischen Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft im Bezirk Erfurt im 1. Halbjahr 1958.

and government functionaries were too often reported for the leniency of their approach to the class situation in the communities for which they were responsible representatives of the socialist state. Many functionaries of the state run Farmers' Mutual Aid Union (*Verein der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe* or VdgB) sympathised with the unwillingness of particularly smaller farmers and *Neubauern* to give up individual use of the farms which they had so laboriously established since the end of the war.¹⁰ Similarly some local state functionaries and local groups of the block parties showed themselves to be less than enthusiastic in support of SED moves towards collectivisation for most of the 1950s, particularly in areas such as *Bezirk* Erfurt where successful medium-sized private farmers formed a large part of the membership of the DBD and CDU (Christian Democratic Union). Even the tractor drivers of the Machine and Tractor Stations (*Maschinen-Traktoren-Stationen* or MTS) were not necessarily reliable, enjoying in some cases better relations with the independent farmers than with the LPG.¹¹ Investigations into the effectiveness of police officers in a number of districts in the *Bezirk* at the end of 1957 found too that strong connections with one or other of the Christian churches had impaired the effectiveness of SED party organisations in the villages and police officers alike.¹² While there was still the prospect of reunification with West Germany in the none too distant future, willingness to resist interference in central elements of rural existence, such as farming and religion remained strong during the 1950s. On essential matters such as the religious education of young people or the collectivisation of farming, the importance of the church as an alternative source of authority in the village came to the fore with clergy occasionally seen to be active in warning against the LPG.¹³

During the 1950s the pressure on farmers to commit themselves to joining or forming an LPG was by no means applied comprehensively in the GDR, or even in *Bezirk* Erfurt, with a consistent degree of urgency or with a consistent set of methods and arguments. It is in the context of this inconsistency that the behaviour and actions of private and collective farmers and the various participants in the regime's apparatus for

¹⁰ Beauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes, from here on BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Büro der Leitung 1481, Leitung der MfS Bezirksverwaltung an den Leiter der Kreisdienststellen, Orientierung auf die Schwerpunkte der operativen Arbeit der Linie III (Landwirtschaft) im I. Quartal 1959 18.12.1958 p.8.

¹¹ The Machine and Tractor stations, manned in part by members of the industrial proletariat, were in theory to function as bulwarks in the otherwise ideologically backward countryside, with responsibilities for a several villages: Gruhle, J. *Ohne Gott und Sonnenschein* (Nauendorf 2002) p. 58.

¹² ThHStAW BDVP 20/044 Politabteilung, Bericht an die Hauptverwaltung – Politische Verwaltung 10.12.1957.

¹³ ThHStAW RdB L1151 Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht über die Entwicklung der LPG seit der 15. Tagung der Bezirksleitung der SED und des Bezirkstages am 23.8.1957.

agitation, when the drive for full collectivisation of agriculture began, need to be understood. The confusion of the situation established in 1960 with the rapid completion, on paper, of full collectivisation was borne out of the variety of attitudes among both farmers and agitators as to what should or would be created by collectivisation in practice, and what would be or should be preserved of the structures and practices of independent farming and private ownership. Collectivisation took place in an atmosphere of uncertainty with regard to the future organisation of agriculture, leaving a lasting element of unpredictability as to the status and future of the LPG.

In the aftermath of the unrest of June 1953 and the introduction of the 'New Course' policies, designed in part to reconcile the population with the SED regime, the explicit forcing of collectivisation was replaced by a set of administrative and economic incentives and pressures. Although the number of LPGs, the proportion of land farmed collectively and the number of LPG members in *Bezirk* Erfurt increased – this was a gradual process, driven less by the successful persuasion of independent farmers or landowners, than the abandonment of land and the recruitment of industrial workers or landless labourers to the collective farms. It was not until 1958 that the rate of formation of new collectives increased significantly, with the participation of formerly independent farmers. The decision taken at the 33rd Session (*Tagung*) of the SED's Central Committee (*Zentralkomitee* or ZK) in the autumn of the previous year to step up the campaign for collectivisation, led to attempts at LPG recruitment aimed primarily at those private farmers who were politically organised in either a party or a mass organisation.¹⁴ From the middle of 1958 at the Vth SED Party Congress (*Parteitag*), the focus of the campaign was expanded to encompass all private farmers, including those so-called *Grossbauern* who had previously been prevented from forming or joining LPGs.¹⁵ Nevertheless during the course of that year the amount of land in the *Bezirk* farmed collectively reached only

¹⁴ Bauer, T. *Blockpartei und Agrarrevolution von Oben. Die DBD 1948-1963* (Munich, 2003) p.441.

¹⁵ District officers of the Stasi were given instructions to prevent such farmers from taking up positions on the boards of the LPG or being chosen to occupy leading functionary positions. In practice of course this proved rather harder to ensure, as one case in the village of Ramsla demonstrated. Here an LPG Type I was established by a farmer who owned 30 hectares of land along with two other farmers. The LPG ran initially as something of a family business with the *Grossbauer* himself chairman, his son the field brigadier and daughter the accountant. Despite this seemingly inauspicious ideological composition, as it transpired, this LPG became something of a model of socialist development. BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Büro der Leitung 1481, Leitung der MfS Bezirksverwaltung an den Leiter der Kreisdienststellen, Orientierung auf die Schwerpunkte der operativen Arbeit der Linie III (Landwirtschaft) im I. Quartal 1959 18.12.1958 p.8; BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Kreisdienststelle Weimar, Analyse über das Dorf Ramsla 2.6.1960 pp.33-40.

17.7%.¹⁶ The vast majority of independent farmers felt themselves able to resist the LPG and the agitators for the time being, if not for ever.

Popular Responses to Collectivisation

Opposition to the formation of collective farms was based on a number of objections, not least unwillingness on the part of traditionally independent farmers to lose private control over their own finances.¹⁷ The effectiveness of economic levers such as high delivery quotas to encourage collectivisation had been balanced out by the incentives for making as much production available as possible for purchase by the state. Successful farmers could certainly double their incomes through the sale of excess produce bought up by the state at higher prices. The prospect of such forms of additional income being restricted as a result of membership in a collective was a strong disincentive for joining. From a purely practical point of view the parlous state of many of the collectives in existence did little to persuade farmers of the value of collective farming either. While the financial situation of the LPGs did gradually improve over the years, at the end of 1959 50% of LPG Type IIIs in the *Bezirk* were nonetheless officially categorised as “financially weak”.¹⁸ A minority of elite LPGs were able to pay high wages and easily exceed their plans. Others managed to get by with some success, taking advantage of the preferential treatment given to LPGs in terms of reduced quotas and access to machinery and fertiliser. The majority however lagged behind. All too often inefficiency, poor work organisation and a lack of commitment to the LPG from its members compounded natural obstacles to improved production levels. The lack of financial success in LPGs inevitably led in some cases to a sour atmosphere among the members. Certainly personal conflicts between members of an LPG put private farmers off joining collective farms. It was enough to live in close proximity to one another without having to work together as well. A report on the problems facing agitators operating in an MTS area in *Kreis Mühlhausen* in December 1959 described the situation in one village thus: “no one wants to join the existing LPG in

¹⁶ Allinson, M *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany 1945-1968* (Manchester 2000) p.78.

¹⁷ Gruhle p.85 : “Zwar sehe ich ein, dass man die besseren Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten hat, aber ich will meine Freiheit haben.”

¹⁸ LPGs were divided into three types: Type I required the collective use of only the land; Type II required the use collectively of both land and machinery; Type III required the collective use of land, machinery and livestock. ThHStAW RdB L562, Bericht über die politische und ökonomische Entwicklung der LPG 1959 und den Stand der Betriebsplanung 1960.

Diedorf because there are always conflicts and people say: ‘we’re not getting involved in that mess’”.¹⁹

A report by a Stasi informant on the LPG Type II in Wahlhausen *Kreis* Heiligenstadt in November 1958 underlines the mutual antagonism felt between private farmers and the LPG. As a private farmer himself he reported on the anger among farmers who were constantly being called upon to pick their fields again for more potatoes even once they had fulfilled their quotas. In contrast he pointed out that the LPG had actually allowed potatoes to go to waste on its own fields. This and other incidences of shoddy practice or mismanagement of the LPG had hardened his attitude against the actual prospect of joining this collective.²⁰ In a further report the informant noted that a leading figure in the LPG had openly proposed that remaining private farmers should be treated more severely in order to make them enter the collective.²¹ For many farmers, the LPG represented nothing so much as being forced into the hands of those who would destroy them.

In the late 1950s the prospect of joining one such LPG did not appeal to either the economic or the social interests of farmers. Rather the LPG was seen at best as a last resort for those unable any longer to run their farms profitably.²² LPGs founded prior to the so-called ‘Socialist Spring’ of 1960 were thus seldom formed by successful and experienced farmers.²³ Rather most often the membership of the LPGs consisted of industrial workers, landless farm labourers and small farmers who lacked the wherewithal to run a large enterprise effectively. Some of the more severe cases came under the scrutiny of the District Party Control Commission of the SED (*Kreispartei kontrollkommission* or KPKK). For example the KPKK carried out an investigation into the LPG Type III in Kindelbrück in 1958 which had been formed largely from abandoned land left in the inexperienced care of the village council (*Rat der*

¹⁹ ThHStAW BDVP 20/134 Kriminalpolizei, VPKA Mühlhausen, Abt. Schutzpolizei – Instrukteurbereich II. Auswertung der Brigadeeinsätze innerhalb des MTS Bereiches Lengefeld zur soz. Umgestaltung der Landwirtschaft 04.12.1959.

²⁰ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Kreisdienststelle Heiligenstadt TA 184/84, Mündlicher Bericht des GI “Traktor” beim Treff am 14.11.1958, 18.11.1958 pp.70-71.

²¹ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Kreisdienststelle Heiligenstadt TA 184/84, Eigener Treffbericht, Treff mit GI “Traktor” 5.12.1958, 9.12.1958 p.72.

²² ThHStAW, RdB L562 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Bericht über die politische und ökonomische Entwicklung der LPG 1959 und den Stand der Betriebsplanung 1960; Grühle pp.76, 87.

²³ As Jonathan Osmond has pointed out, some wealthier farmers sought however to avoid joining an already existing LPG and to limit outside interference by forming their own LPG Type I: Osmond, J. “From Juncker Estate to Cooperative Farm: East German Agrarian Society 1945-1961” in Major, P. and Osmond J. (eds.) *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-1971* (Manchester 2002) pp.130-150 - here p.139.

Gemeinde or RdG). The members of the LPG were exclusively former agricultural labourers and thus while not new to agriculture, had no experience between them of running a farm as a whole. More significantly they had little livestock or draft animals let alone machinery with which to work on fields which had been allowed to grow thick with weeds. State subsidies were thus absolutely vital over a number of years to enable the LPG to construct a collective livestock shed. Even with this support, however, members were scarcely able to raise enough profits to give themselves sufficient income, causing disgruntlement among the members.²⁴ Even as the drive towards full collectivisation was to pick up speed, previously formed LPGs began to implode unable to give their members a sufficient income to live on. In the LPG Type I Grossmonra, *Kreis Sömmerda* 19 members of the LPG resigned sending official notice to the LPG board, some of whom to the outrage of the KPKK even consulted a lawyer. In addition the SED party secretary in the LPG made clear his intention to hand in his party document. Of the 19, 13 were persuaded to return to the LPG, 2 were refused re-entry and 4 remained outside.²⁵

Lacking the means to employ a sufficient workforce or children who would run the farm, older farmers often found no other way to cope with the oppressive demands placed upon them by the state, than forming or joining an LPG. Here the question of access to machinery was in many cases decisive. From the beginning of 1958 the MTS were directed to serve primarily the LPGs rather than allow their machinery to be rented by private farmers. In practice this did not occur everywhere with MTS workers often preferring, whether out of conviction or financial incentive, to continue to serve private farmers in some cases to the detriment of the LPGs.²⁶ It was easier for example for an MTS worker to fulfil his quota of fields harvested or ploughed if he did not have to move his tractor to a different valley halfway through the day. However the preference given to the LPGs on the whole in terms of access to new machinery (reinforced by the decision announced at the VI. LPG Conference in February 1959 that at first only LPG Type IIIs in fully collectivised villages with over 500 hectares should receive the machinery of the

²⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4-103 SED Bezirksleitung BPKK, KPKK Sömmerda, Bericht über die Untersuchung in der LPG Kindelbrück 18.6.1958 pp.98-100.

²⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 103 SED Bezirksleitung BPKK, KPKK Sömmerda, Bericht der KPKK über die Untersuchungen in Grossmonra 9.6.1959 p.113.

²⁶ Gruhle p.45 for an example in Barchfeld, Kreis Weimar – an MTS Brigadier was replaced for neglecting LPG and serving the *Grossbauern*.

MTS on long-term loan) encouraged private farmers to join up.²⁷ Faced with the possibility of being denied access to machinery and with too little money to purchase their own, some of the less wealthy farmers were moved to join or form LPGs. This however did little to change the image of the agricultural collectives among the more successful independent farmers as the last resort for the desperate.

At this stage the attainment of full collectivisation remained remote for all concerned. If some independent farmers expected German reunification, a third world war or the state's financial dire straits to intervene before collectivisation was completed, as far as the SED leadership were concerned, full collectivisation would not be possible for several years yet either. The State Planning Commission initially had decided on 1963 and then 1965 as attainable deadlines for full collectivisation.²⁸ Given the potential damage to the economy and to the ability of the GDR to supply itself with food at a time when the SED leadership explicitly sought to demonstrate superior living standards in comparison with the FRG, progress in the formation of LPGs remained gradual and incremental. Successful private farmers were well aware of the weakness of the LPGs and their own importance to maintaining production levels and dismissed the prospect of collectivisation accordingly. Functionaries throughout the administration of agriculture and the government of rural communities were aware of this too and were reluctant to agitate for collectivisation when farmers remained so clearly opposed to it. Even the most dedicated to the socialist cause or the class conflict were wary of compromising the supply of food to the population.

The Limits of Local Agitation

In *Bezirk* Erfurt the rate of collectivisation in 1959 had sunk below that of the previous year, with a total of 59 new LPGs founded adding only a further 4.9% of the agricultural land in the *Bezirk* to the amount farmed in collectives. This slow progress was put down, above all, quite simply to the unwillingness of independent farmers to join the LPG, nevertheless it was also clear that at a local level not enough was being done to win them over. Old antagonisms had led existing LPGs to refuse to accept new members from

²⁷ ThHStAW, RdB L562, Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht über die politische und ökonomische Entwicklung der LPG 1959 und den Stand der Betriebsplanung 1960. Following, for example, the transfer of machinery to the LPG Tüngeda in Bad Langensalza, six independent farmers applied for entry.

²⁸ Bauer p.442.

among those who had long rejected the collective. More generally consensus had by no means been achieved as to whether collectivisation could or should be achieved in the near future among the functionaries of those local institutions on which the SED leadership relied to exert its influence over farmers - from the village SED organisation, the block party groups, the mass organisations as well as the village and district state administration, the MTS and any nearby factories. Assessments of opinion in SED organisations in the countryside uncovered a number of individual SED members, party secretaries as well as entire party organisations who were unsupportive of the current progress of collectivisation. Given the lack of SED members among the farming population, the local organisations of the Farmers' Mutual Aid Union (*Verein der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe* or VdGB) provided a network through which the regime sought to exert its influence on private farmers and rural communities in general. However it was widely recognised that local VdGB organisations could not always be relied upon to espouse the party line with regard to agriculture, particularly on such a divisive issue as full collectivisation. In January and February 1960, the Stasi *Bezirk* administration sought to rectify this by instructing their district offices to see that those farmers standing for election to local VdGB governing boards were politically and ideologically suitable.²⁹ Regardless of these instructions, it was clear in early 1960 that in the majority of villages, the local VdGB organisations could not be relied upon to act in accordance with SED policy.³⁰ In March 1960 at least 26 chairmen of local VdGB organisations in *Kreis Arnstadt* were dismissed from their posts for failing to support 'the socialist transformation of agriculture'.³¹

The unreliability of those charged with driving forward the collectivisation process on the ground is in many respects wholly explicable given the choices they were faced with. Up until 1960, unless one believed in the importance of collectivisation in itself, there was little reason actively to campaign on its behalf. Joining an LPG had not been made obligatory by law, most farmers opposed the idea and the potential for success was limited by the ease with which rural communities could close ranks against the small

²⁹ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Büro der Leitung 1446, Leitung der Bezirksverwaltung an die Leiter der Kreisdienststellen, Orientierung auf die Schwerpunkte der Linie III in Auswertung der Arbeitstagungen vom 11.1.1960 und 16.2.1960, 19.2.1960 p.1.

³⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/2-322 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft an das Sekretariat: Bericht über die Vorbereitung der Organisationswahlen der VdGB und ihre Unterstützung durch die Partei. 12.3.1960 pp.168-176.

³¹ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 16/60 Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 22.3.1960.

numbers of activists who were prepared to advocate the policies of the SED regime. The secretary of the SED organisation and pub landlord in a village in *Kreis Mühlhausen* explained his inaction quite simply, with the reasoning that if he were to make his support for socialism known – “no one will drink a glass of beer in his pub anymore.”³² The difficulty of winning over farmers was particularly acute in those communities where the church and religion still played a major role in the attitudes of the community as a whole to the latest moves by the SED. In the Eichsfeld districts based around the small towns of Worbis and Heiligenstadt where Catholicism predominated the functionaries charged with advocating collectivisation tended either to lack the conviction themselves or simply had insufficient authority within the community to make a convincing case.³³ Consequently almost no progress was made in the development of LPGs here. In districts where the Reformed Protestant church predominated, pastors in a number of villages undermined potential support for the LPG by speaking out against collectivisation. Their views were not opposed even by the functionaries of local government and members of the SED and block parties who themselves had in some cases remained practising Christians.³⁴ Given the resolve of farmers and rural communities to resist collectivisation, and the lack of resolve among rural functionaries to campaign for it, there appeared in most villages to be no coordinated or coherent strategy for overcoming opposition to full collectivisation.

After a difficult harvest in 1959 owing to a long period without rain and even greater need for rapid increases in production in order to keep pace with higher consumption levels, it was clear more had to be done to achieve a leap forward in productivity. Despite the intention to create at least one LPG in every village by the end of 1959, on 31st December, 114 separate communities were recorded in *Bezirk Erfurt* without any LPGs at all.³⁵ The replacement of Erich Mückenberger as Agriculture Secretary in the Central Committee by Gerhard Grüneberg³⁶ during the 7th Session of the Central Committee in December 1959 signalled a change to a higher risk policy of rapid

³² ThHStAW BDVP 20/134 Kriminalpolizei, Kontrolle und Anleitung bei der Abt. K. Mühlhausen am 26.11.1959.

³³ ThHStAW BDVP 20/106, Schutzpolizei, Bericht über die Kontrolle und Anleitung im VPKA Heiligenstadt 19.10-14.11.1959; 20.11.1959 Also Allinson pp.79-80.

³⁴ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065, Stab/Operativstab, Information 6/60 24.2.1960.

³⁵ ThHStAW, RdB L562 Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht über die politische und ökonomische Entwicklung der LPG 1959 und den Stand der Betriebsplanung 1960, undated (Feb. 1960).

³⁶ Gerhard Grüneberg (1921-1981) from 1960 to 1980 was Secretary for Agriculture in the ZK and from 1966 member of the Politburo of the ZK.

collectivisation despite the short term economic shortfalls this would inflict.³⁷ Brigades of agitators had already been deployed around the *Bezirk* charged with persuading farmers to form LPGs, establishing bridgeheads from which to move the campaign in the districts forward. However their impact on farmers remained limited. With relatively few qualified personnel available to staff the brigades, the amount of time each brigade was able to spend in a single village was not limitless. Farmers who had no desire to join an LPG could thus effectively resist outside interference by weathering the storm and awaiting the brigade's departure. The strategy of relying on the propaganda impact of the media, the persuasive efforts of village functionaries and the deployment of occasional brigades of agitators alongside the usual tactics of economic pressure and incentive lacked the required level of 'continuous confrontation'. The SED Central Committee thus charged the SED *Bezirksleitungen* with developing a programme of intensive campaigns in the villages.

The Campaign Intensified

Thus far the basic weakness of the SED's influence over the rural population and the basic unreliability of the network of functionaries operating at a district and local level in agriculture and rural society had been all too clearly demonstrated. At the same time many farmers had exposed themselves as opponents of the socialist regime who were willing to resist as far as they could any change in the organisation of agriculture. As such they appeared too to be forces of reaction standing in the way of the social transformation of rural society. Seen in these terms, the value of a more rigorous approach towards resistant farmers was clear. A campaign which mobilised large numbers of supporters of SED policy and placed rural and agricultural functionaries under close scrutiny would be a telling reminder of the SED leadership's strength as well as a useful means of testing loyalty and exposing opposition in the countryside. The move then in early 1960 to accelerate the process and race towards full collectivisation, even if decided much in advance by the SED leadership, was met with considerable trepidation by functionaries operating in rural communities themselves and at lower levels in the administration of agriculture. At the same time, farmers were shocked by the virulence with which they

³⁷ Bauer p.461.

were being ‘persuaded’ to join or form LPGs, prompting equally radical responses, not least of which was flight westwards to the Federal Republic.

From the end of January 1960 the number of brigades of agitators arguing for collectivisation in the villages was greatly increased. The personnel of the brigades was made up of politically reliable citizens drawn from a number of urban and rural institutions: staff and students from universities and polytechnics, MTS and VEG officials as well as functionaries of all political parties and mass organisations were called upon to promote the ‘socialist transformation’ of the countryside. Once these had been briefed on the arguments in favour of collectivisation and the benefits of the LPG, they were sent into the countryside to liaise with local functionaries and party members, visit farmers in their homes and arrange public meetings, staying in the rural communities for a number of days if necessary.

The success of these brigades varied according to their own competency, leadership and organisation as well as the receptiveness of the communities which they entered. The poor behaviour of certain brigade members and the lack of technical agricultural knowledge of urban students and functionaries certainly aggravated the resistance among villagers, who resented being bullied by what they saw as a group of ignorant “townies” into acting against their will and common sense.³⁸ With agitation brigades staying for days at a time in the villages, local functionaries were given the task of ensuring they were provided with food and accommodation, as well as the requisite information on the locality. While the brigades appear in most cases to have received sufficient support, deficiencies of local functionaries could severely impair the work of the brigades. For example in Niedersynstedt, in *Kreis* Weimar, the accommodation provided had been locked when the brigade arrived and the members of the one existing LPG in the village refused to let any brigade members stay in their houses. In another instance in *Kreis* Weimar the deputy mayor responded to the claim by members of the agitation brigade that they intended to remain as long as it would take for them to achieve their goal, with the disparaging remark: “let’s see who’s going to last longer.”³⁹

Nevertheless some brigades were able to make an impact in the villages, especially if they had been effectively briefed with information on the local circumstances – a task

³⁸ Gruhle p.168: “Die Zusage der Unterbringung war vorhanden, und als die Genossen hinkamen, waren die Türen verschlossen...”

³⁹ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 6/60 Landwirtschaft 24.2.1960.

which largely fell to the local police officer (*Abschnittsbevollmächtigter* or ABV). Despite broad resistance to the idea of collectivisation, invariably some village inhabitants saw the advantages of the collective farm, not least if they were at a disadvantage in the existing social structure. The brigades thus sought to make use of potential splits between generations, contrasting the low wages of a family member on a private farm with possible earnings in the collective. Similarly they sought to highlight the freedom of small land holders, particularly single women, from obligation to the larger farmers in the village which supposedly the collective would bring. Attention was also focused on the wives of private farmers.⁴⁰ The alleviation of their heavy work load in the fields and in the home which the LPG claimed to provide as well as the opportunity to gain qualifications, certainly appealed to some women, (although many farmers' wives remained among the staunchest of opponents to the LPG).⁴¹

In the village of Wandersleben in *Kreis* Gotha, the prospects for a successful collectivisation were quite good. Much of the farming community had benefited from socialist policy in rural areas over the years. 400 hectares had been made available during the land reforms in the late 1940s, an LPG Type III had been in existence since 1952 and had managed to raise its grain production levels higher even than the average in West Germany. Furthermore it was claimed that the LPG's mastery of maize production in accordance with a much-disputed SED policy had enabled it to avoid the feed problems suffered by many other farms. Meanwhile Wandersleben itself had developed into a local centre of commerce as well as education with an expanded school population and the establishment of an agricultural vocational school. Within the village there were organisations of the SED, CDU and DBD as well as the major mass organisations – the Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend* or FDJ), the Democratic Women's Union (*Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands* or DFD), the Free German Trade Union Association (*Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* or FDGB). The regime was also represented in local sport in the Society for Sport and Technology (*Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik* or GST) and the German Athletics and Sports Union (*Deutscher Turn- und Sportbund* or DTSB) and care for the elderly with the People's Solidarity Organisation

⁴⁰ ThHStAW RdB L590 Abt. Landwirtschaft Einschätzung über die Stadt Kindelbrück 3.3.1960.

⁴¹ See Osmond, J. "From Juncker Estate to Cooperative Farm: East German Agrarian Society 1945-1961" in Major, P. and Osmond J. (eds.) *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-1971* (Manchester 2002) pp.130-150 - here p.140.

(*Volkssolidarität*). Private farmers too were organised in a local organisation of the VdGB – though the lack of a chairman rendered the organisation ineffective. Importantly the village state assembly contained a mixture of collective and private farmers as well as industrial workers.

Nonetheless by the end of 1959 still 50% of farmers based around Wandersleben had not been persuaded to join or form an LPG. Some private farmers who had high yields from livestock production - producing double their state quotas – expected collectivisation to cut their profits. Others claimed simply – “At the end of the day, I don’t want to become an estate farm labourer.” In order to bolster the impetus of the campaign, a brigade of agitators organised by the *Bezirk* committee of the National Front - with representatives from the SED *Kreisleitung*, the *Rat des Kreises* and the VdGB and CDU district leaderships - joined members of the local committee to canvass support across all the sections of the community in the village. Railway workers, many of whom owned and farmed small plots but were exempt from delivery quotas were to be persuaded to get involved with the LPG or at least lease their land to the collective. Christian leaders and young people were targeted to persuade them to participate in the campaign for collectivisation, while visits were organised to see a functioning LPG and to view Soviet technology in action. In addition the members of the brigade were armed with information on how much each private farmer was profiting from their current state quotas in order to shame people for exploiting the system.⁴²

In Wandersleben as elsewhere in the *Bezirk*, the initial progress of these campaigns was however still tortuously slow. Farmers who had resisted collectivisation thus far continued with the usual methods of weathering the storm. They avoided entering into conversation with the brigades by shutting doors, disappearing into the fields, and avoiding or keeping quiet at public meetings.⁴³ Where they could be brought to talk, farmers were careful to raise arguments with which they sought to put off agitators without necessarily exposing themselves to accusations of opposition to socialism. One farmer in Oberdorla *Kreis* Mühlhausen called for the immediate implementation of communism rather than just socialism – claiming that just as the workers were given

⁴² ThHStAW NF 136, Bezirkssekretariat, Erster Entwurf, Dorfplan 1960 der Gemeinde Wandersleben, Kr. Gotha p.1; Bezirkssekretariat, Beschluss – Brigadeinsatz Wandersleben 29.12.1959 p.14; Bezirkssekretariat, Kurzanalyse über die Situation in Wandersleben, Kreis Gotha 9.1.1960 p.21.

⁴³ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Politabteilung Information 5/60 Landwirtschaft, 15.2.1960.

complete factories, so would he enter the LPG once the state had built the new livestock sheds. Another pointed out that private farmers still existed in the Soviet Union, so why not allow them here. More widely private farmers argued that they would produce more if they were allowed to continue to farm individually but received the same financial support as the LPG, enabling them better to do their duty to socialism in fulfilling the seven-year plan. Alternatively they agreed to the principle of the LPG, deferring, however, their entry until they had passed on the farm to the next generation, the harvest had been brought in or at the very least until relatives or certain other prominent figures in the community had agreed to join as well.⁴⁴ Others more honestly said that they would only join when they had no other choice, but not until then. In the village of Hollenbach for example, the wife of an independent farmer told the brigade that her husband was out and refused to let them into the house. In the ensuing discussion she then stated: “we are still doing well, and we want to keep our independence...if the water’s up to our necks, then we’ll go into the LPG.” Similarly other farmers made it clear that they would not join voluntarily, but would do so only if they were forced to join or if it were made illegal not to.⁴⁵ The principle of voluntary entry into the LPG enshrined in the model statutes was a key grievance of farmers who felt the humiliation of “giving up” the farms of their forefathers far more keenly as a result of this clause. Resistance in a number of villages continued thus to be broad and resolute and with rumours circulating that an international summit meeting in Paris in May of that year would “change everything”, many decided to try to hold out until the direction of the political tide was certain.⁴⁶

The “Socialist Spring”

The SED’s response to ongoing resistance and the lack of any very significant rise in the percentage of land in the collectives by March, was to increase the intensity of the campaigns still further. Following a meeting between the first secretaries of the SED *Bezirksleitungen* at the ZK to discuss agricultural questions on 11th March 1960, the

⁴⁴ ThHStAW BDVP 20/134 Kriminalpolizei, Abt. K. Dezernat SE: Bericht über die Mitarbeit der Volkspolizei bei dem Brigadeinsatz zur soz. Umgestaltung der Landwirtschaft 27.11.1959; ThHStAW RdB Abt. Landwirtschaft L590 Einschätzung über die Stadt Kindelbrück 3.3.1960; ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab Information 17/60: Information und Gerüchte 23.3.1960; ThHStAW BDVP 20/134 Kriminalpolizei, VPKA Mühlhausen, Abt. Schutzpolizei, Ergebnisse der Auswertung der Brigaden innerhalb des MTS-Bereiches Görmär, 10.12.1959.

⁴⁵ ThHStAW BDVP 20/134 Kriminalpolizei, VPKA Mühlhausen, Abt. Schutzpolizei – Instrukteurbereich II. Auswertung der Brigadeeinsätze innerhalb des MTS Bereiches Lengefeld zur soz. Umgestaltung der Landwirtschaft 04.12.1959.

⁴⁶ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab Information 17/60: Argumente und Gerüchte 23.3.1960.

Bezirksleitung passed a resolution laying out the initial steps towards mobilising forces loyal to the regime throughout the countryside. Meetings were to be held between the *Bezirksleitung*, the SED district 1st secretaries and the agricultural functionaries in the *Rat des Bezirks*. All the heads of the block parties, the mass organisations and other *Bezirk*-wide institutions were to meet to agree a common strategy with regard to collectivisation and in all the districts conferences were to be held in the course of the week which all responsible functionaries, mayors and chairmen of district institutions were to attend. The numbers of agitators in the brigades operating in the *Bezirk* rose to as many as 9,724 on March 26th – drawing on factory workers and employees from other enterprises to bolster numbers.⁴⁷ Such intimidating and constant pressure soon began to have results. With attention focused on the lead farmers in each community to form the collective, others soon joined, unwilling to resist unaided and to some extent reassured of the economic viability of the LPGs. Reports on the efforts of a brigade operating in early March in the small agricultural town of Kindelbrück in *Kreis Sömmerda* illustrate some of the methods employed. Over the week from 3rd to 11th of March 1960 the 16 members of the agitation brigade were to divide into five groups each concentrating on a single farm. During the course of the week, members of the board of the existing LPGs, the MTS and two neighbouring State Owned Farms (*Volkseigene Güter* or VEG) were to be called upon to assist with the work of the brigade, while the arguments arising from individual discussions with the farmers were to be published in the press and names of resistant farmers announced using the loud speaker. During the following week, the work of the brigade was intensified. Meetings were arranged with the school teachers and the National Front representatives in each house and street were called upon to involve all inhabitants in arguing for the collectivisation, while the local ABV was called upon to produce a list of citizens working for institutions of the state or collective, presumably to be recruited for the same purpose. Meetings were arranged too with larger groups of farmers, while other farms were ominously marked out to be subjected to “constant discussion”. On the week-ends two members of the brigade were charged with organising further brigades of local inhabitants to continue to apply pressure, while during the week farmers were invited individually to the town hall for private discussions. After continuous efforts, the agitation

⁴⁷ Allinson p. 82

brigade's loud speaker claimed by 24th March that the formation of an LPG had been secured. This included the 5 farms targeted in the first week joined by 7 more. Nonetheless 30% of the land attached to Kindelbrück remained outside the collective.⁴⁸

The extent to which force was used explicitly is not clear, however the participation of the (people's) police as part of the agitation brigades implied threat enough of imprisonment for some farmers. The "discovery" of insignificant illegal actions by farmers appears too to have been used to break their resistance to entering the LPG.⁴⁹ A letter from the chief of the *Kreis* Weimar-Land police department to his superiors at the *Bezirk* describes the situation as follows:

Through intensive investigations carried out by colleagues in the Criminal Department of the Weimar police station it was possible to uncover a number of law-breakers and using individual, tactically correct discussions persuade these same people to join the LPG, without having used force. Thus in serious cases as many as 15 people were invited to the Criminal Department with whom individual discussions were held. As a result of these conversations a whole number of other agricultural enterprises [i.e. farms] have joined in the socialist transformation. Typical for the situation was the fact that it was mostly the spokesmen of the communities who were involved... However contrary to rumours circulating at the *Bezirk* attorney's offices, I would like to declare that during these actions no arrests of farmers were made.⁵⁰

A set of instructions issued by the SED *Bezirksleitung* to the *Kreisleitungen* on 21st March complained that a number of district and village functionaries were not being strict in upholding the law and were therefore themselves hindering the process of socialist transformation in the countryside. As a solution it recommended the *Kreisleitungen* follow the example of the SED *Kreisleitung* in *Kreis* Arnstadt and form groups of financial experts to assess individual farmers – with the implicit suggestion that any irregularities uncovered could be used to encourage participation in the LPGs.⁵¹ The use of mayors'

⁴⁸ ThHStAW RdB L590 Abt. Landwirtschaft Einschätzung über die Stadt Kindelbrück, März 1960.

⁴⁹ Thus a list of "illegal activities" was collected by the brigade operating in Kindelbrück as part of their campaign. ThHStAW RdB L590 Einschätzung über die Stadt Kindelbrück – Feststellungen der Brigade zu Fragen der Ungegesetzlichkeiten.

⁵⁰ ThHStAW BDVP 20/081 Stab/Operativstab, VPKA Weimar an die BDVP Stellvertreter Operativ, Bericht über den Instrukteureinsatz zur Unterstützung der Amtsleitung des VPKA Weimar bei der sozialistischen Umgestaltung der Landwirtschaft 28.3.1960.

⁵¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/2-322 SED Bezirksleitung Fernschreiben an alle 1. Kreissekretäre Beschluss-Protokoll Nr. 10/60 der Sekretariatssitzung vom 21.3.1960. p.144.

offices in which to hold interviews with resistant farmers increased the impression – where it had not been explicitly expressed - of possible state sanctions. The use of the formula which connected support for the collectivisation with support for socialism and hence for peace provided a logical net with which farmers could be threatened and labelled as warmongers should they continue to object. Farmers identified as ring-leaders of opposition to collectivisation were especially vulnerable if their war record or some other element of their past could designate them fascist or reactionary. Furthermore there were limits to the farmers' abilities to defend themselves, with forcible prevention of 'trespassing' on their land or indeed mere insults directed at the agitators likely to mark them out as especially hostile.

Alongside open demonstrations of state power, the Ministry for State Security had too a covert role to play in driving forward the collectivisation campaign. Judging from assessments by the Ministry's *Bezirk* administration, the Stasi had not yet recruited sufficient numbers of informants in order to gain a complete picture of events in the villages, making a campaign of recruitment necessary. Thus it would seem that the Stasi had at this stage neither penetrated most rural communities nor had recruited many informants from the field of agriculture. Nevertheless it was determined to use those informants which had been recruited. Above all it was considered possible to influence the formation of new LPGs by forcing those *Grossbauern* who had been recruited (for whatever reason) as Stasi informants to demonstrate their support for collectivisation by joining a collective farm 'voluntarily'.⁵²

Despite the use or threat of considerable force in the process of collectivisation, it is also clear that some farmers bargained with local and district functionaries for their participation in the LPG. The urgency of the agitation brigades' requirement for a signature or an agreement in order to be able to claim full collectivisation had been achieved within their area on time, certainly led to verbal concessions to the farmers' desires. The wish of some larger farmers to form their own collective, to the exclusion of weaker small farms, while not permitted in the initial months of the collectivisation campaign, was allowed as the deadlines grew more imminent. Thus a police report on *Kreis Nordhausen* in April mentions villagers' irritation that 3 of the largest and best

⁵² BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Büro der Leitung 1446, Leitung der Bezirksverwaltung an die Leiter der Kreisdienststellen, Orientierung auf die Schwerpunkte der Linie III in Auswertung der Arbeitstagungen vom 11.1.1960 und 16.2.1960, 19.2.1960 p.1.

farmers have been allowed to set up an LPG Type I on their own.⁵³ Where this went too far such as in a 15-point set of written conditions for entry into the LPG which one farmer dared to put to the mayor in March 1960 in a village in *Kreis Sömmerda*, the Stasi could be involved.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, if the claims of farmers following collectivisation are to be believed, far-reaching concessions were indeed granted in return for their agreement. These ranged from the freedom to harvest independently in 1960 to guarantees of a certain level of profit or wage level, which matched their previous incomes. Thus a police report from 23rd March 1960 points to increasing demands from farmers in *Kreis Sömmerda* in return for LPG entry such as a minimum wage of 400DM or full reimbursement for the livestock and equipment brought into the collective. Requests were also made for documents allowing travel to West Germany in return for joining an LPG.⁵⁵

According to statistics produced by the SED *Bezirksleitung* after collectivisation had been nominally completed on 2nd April, between 21st March and 1st April the percentage of arable land in the *Bezirk* farmed collectively doubled from 40 to 80%, entailing quite literally the founding of farming collectives overnight, particularly on the weekend of 25th-27th March.⁵⁶ The situation on paper was a long way removed from the reality however. Sufficient signatures might have been gained agreeing to participation in the LPG, but the terms on which these agreements were reached, did little to assuage the doubts of both farmers and many functionaries as to the long-term viability of LPGs. Nor indeed, despite the publication of model statutes in 1959, was there certainty as to how the practice of collective farming should be undertaken.

Conclusion

Once the success of reaching full collectivisation throughout the *Bezirk* had been celebrated with greater or lesser degrees of sincerity in the villages in April 1960, the difficult task of establishing actual functioning collective farms began. The practical purpose behind forming the collectives was to achieve large field cultivation of crops and larger more concentrated livestock holdings which allowed production to be increased as

⁵³ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab Information 10/60 26.2.1960; Information 18/60 21.4.1960.

⁵⁴ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab Information 14/60 Landwirtschaft 21.3.1960.

⁵⁵ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab Information 17/60 Argumente und Gerüchte 23.3.1960.

⁵⁶ Gruhle p.208: "Die zweite Übersicht zeigt dass die Forcierung der Agitationseinsätze bewusst auf das Wochenende vom 26. und 27. März 1960 her zugeschnitten worden war..."

well as more effectively planned and controlled. Conditions thus had to be created in which these goals could be realised, while in addition basic questions of how the collective farm was to be managed and who was to do it had to be addressed. Other fundamentals of organisation such as the calculation of wages, the division of profits, the allocation of private plots, working hours and delegation of responsibility had too to be settled in practice among the members. Alongside these organisational issues, however farmers had still to be convinced to be as good as their signature and actually work together in the collective.

The collectivisation was an impressive feat of administration, but neither the political nor the practical argument had been won for most farmers. In addition the collectivisation process itself had demonstrated the limitations of the SED regime's authority in rural areas. Worse still the manner in which the collectivisation had taken place had left plenty of room for future conflict and recrimination, disorganisation and instability in farming, in the administration of agriculture and rural communities in general. There was too a real danger that this attack on farmers would rebound on the population at large through food shortages. Nonetheless new parameters had been set in which the transmission of authority in agriculture and rural society were to function. Both farmers and the SED regime (and its local representatives) with completion of full collectivisation had signed up to a new set of roles and responsibilities – how these roles and responsibilities were interpreted and transformed was however by no means settled.

In the following section the bases of conflict and the expression of opposition in the aftermath of full collectivisation will be examined along with the processes through which regional and local functionaries sought to resolve these conflicts and consolidate the political, financial and organisational stability within LPGs prior to the increased restriction of flight to the West resulting from the construction of the Berlin Wall on 13th August 1961.

CHAPTER 2

The Aftermath of Collectivisation

“The laws and regulations are not applicable to us. We as farmers have the say over our agriculture.”¹
(Farmer, Mosbach, *Kreis* Eisenach reported by the police in September 1960.)

The massive deployment of agitation brigades in the countryside and a number of tactics ranging from genuine persuasion through to public humiliation, intimidation and incarceration succeeded in moving the vast majority of farmers in the GDR to sign up to a collective farm. Beyond the paper work however, the situation was by no means so clear cut. It was one thing for farmers to be brought to sign up to participation in a collective farm, it was quite another for these farms to get up and running in practice. The farmer quoted above was by no means alone in his sentiments and the apparatus of communication and control available to the SED leadership in the countryside proved itself inadequate to take concerted action against farmers who insisted upon their independence.

The model statutes according to which LPGs were supposed to be organised - established first in 1952 and modified in 1959 - were not entirely unfamiliar to most of the newly collectivised farmers. Most had some knowledge of a nearby LPG and discussion of the content of the three types of model statute had been part of the agitation campaign. Nonetheless the assumption of the roles and responsibilities laid out in the model statutes was no simple matter and represented considerable changes not only to farmers' daily routines, but also to their relationship with their fellows, their land and in the LPG Type III, to their livestock. It changed above all their sense of their own status. Relinquishing individual control over property was considered tantamount to expropriation, and participation in a collective brigade under another's authority was tantamount to becoming a farm labourer.² Rural communities were thus fraught with discord and many farmers continued to reject the agricultural collectives, refusing to take part in collective work and in some cases abandoning their farms and fleeing the GDR altogether. The speed and aggression with which the collectivisation campaign had been completed, and the

¹ ThHStAW BDVP 20/044 Politabteilung, VPKA Eisenach Einschätzung der Feindtätigkeit im Kreis Eisenach 9.9.1960.

² ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 17/60 Argumente und Gerüchte 23.3.1960: “Eintritt in die LPG bedeutet Enteignung und Aufgabe des freien Bauern, man wird kommandiert.”

inadequacies of the regime's apparatus for governing agriculture and rural society at a local level limited further the prospects for swift acceptance of collective farming practices. Nevertheless amid all the conflict, disruption and uncertainty at this time, both older and new LPGs did begin a slow, by no means immediately successful, process of consolidation. New parameters were officially set to the relationship between the individual farmer, his community and the state, and the longer the LPGs survived the more necessary it became to assert one's interests within rather than against them.

The Conditions of Collectivised Agriculture

These new parameters – the conditions in which farming was now to take place - were defined in part by the 1959 LPG Law and the three different types of model statute which provided the basis for the rights and responsibilities of collective farmers and dictated the basic administrative and financial structure of collective farms.³

The LPG Type I was aimed clearly at those who wished to retain as much independent control over their property as possible. The only aspect of farming which had to be managed collectively was the arable land brought in by each farmer. It was therefore an obvious choice for the majority of those who formed an LPG, reluctantly, during 'the Socialist Spring'. Of central importance to Type I farmers was their continued private use and ownership of their own livestock and the stipulation that at least 40% of the profits of the LPG had to be shared among the members according to the amount of land each one had contributed to the collective farm. With these embellishments, the bitter pill of collectivisation and the sense of expropriation and loss of independence were at least to some extent mitigated. Nonetheless the model statute's aim was to commit the farmers who had agreed to it (albeit in most cases under some sort of duress) to developing real forms of collective practice, at least as far as the arable land was concerned. Clause II.4 required the removal of any border markers and divisions between field plots, the amalgamation of fields and the use of a crop rotation in accordance with state plans.

Although the members continued to own privately their own machinery, they were required to put these at the disposal of the LPG in return for a suitable rent should the majority of the members' assembly vote for it. The concessions to the will of farmers to

³ LPG Model Statutes and the LPG Law 1959 published in the *Gesetzblatt der DDR* (Berlin 1959).

retain their independence were not insignificant, however the formation of the LPG as an institution was nonetheless a radical and symbolic step. The establishment of an administrative structure - comprising ideally a hierarchy of a chairman and managing board, brigades and brigade leaders, as well as an accountant and various commissions – provided the means for the SED state to gain more consistent and more comprehensive control over farmers and all aspects of agricultural production. Moreover the LPG Type I, as the first of three Types, was recognisably a stepping stone on the way to much greater degrees of collectivisation of property: those who formed the LPG Type I realised it was unlikely that their children would be able to inherit as much individual control over land, livestock and machinery.

The model statute of the LPG Type II entailed a still more immediate commitment to reducing private ownership of livestock in the interests of developing collective herds. Here the arable land, machinery, equipment and draft animals as far as they were not necessary for farming individual land and livestock were held by the collective and only 30% of profits were shared according to the amount of land contributed. Only very few new farmers chose to form an LPG Type II seeing little benefit in adopting a statute which was explicitly geared towards transition to greater collective control sooner rather than later. The Type II statute's significance lies rather in its use as a legal tool for shifting the terms on which farmers "agreed" to participate in the LPG. As of 1962, the right of farmers to withdraw from the collective was redefined in an altered Type II statute as being valid only if so doing was "for the benefit of society". This was a suitably vague term giving the state apparatus the explicit sanction of the law in its long running battle to prevent LPGs – of all types – haemorrhaging much needed manpower and expertise. In being prevented from withdrawing from the LPG or taking up other careers unless they had the full agreement of the *Rat des Kreises*, the LPG leadership, and a majority of their fellow LPG members, farmers had increasingly to face up to the prospect of earning their livelihood only under the conditions of collective farming. The incentive for making the best of an inescapable situation (given that fleeing the country for most was not a realistic option even before the Berlin Wall had been constructed) became increasingly apparent. For some formerly independent farmers, confident in the permanence of the SED regime, the lack of alternatives to collective farming encouraged them to embrace it fully by

taking up the statute of the LPG Type III, rather than cling on to what vestiges of the old system were available to them.

In contrast to the LPG Type I, the model statute of the LPG Type III entailed comprehensive acceptance of the collective farming idea – it committed farmers to building up collective livestock, placed grazing land in collective use alongside the arable land and presupposed the most active participation in the life of the collective farm, placing minimal emphasis on property and maximum on labour. In all types of LPGs, members had the right to retain private use of a certain amount of arable land as well as a garden plot. The amount of individual land according to the model statute was not to exceed half a hectare for each household in the LPG – the idea being in theory to prevent a family with several LPG members accumulating a private plot of several hectares. While farmers in other types of LPGs were able to retain their own livestock, farmers in Type III were restricted to a set number of animals kept for private use, limiting the distinction in incomes between members and ensuring everyone continued to devote themselves to work for the collective.⁴ 80% of the profits of the LPG Type IIIs were to be shared among the members according to the amount of labour they contributed, as measured in work units, calculated according to norms which reflected the expertise, time and effort required to do various jobs around the farm. Only 20% was shared on the basis of land contributions. As such the LPG Type III was the preferred choice of all those who had little more than their labour to contribute to the farm, as it was necessary for all members to devote most of their time to work for the collective in order to earn sufficient income. On entry into an LPG Type III, a minimum contribution had to be made to the basic material and financial capital of the collective farm. This was paid either in cash, often in instalments, or in the form of livestock, equipment and buildings required by the collective. Most of the LPG Type IIIs in *Bezirk* Erfurt were founded before the “Socialist Spring”, taking over abandoned land and relying on the manpower of workers recruited from industry, landless farm labourers and small holders. While having the most state backing, they rarely were in possession of the best land and livestock or the most expert workforce. The completion of collectivisation changed this to some extent by compelling some independent farmers to join existing Type IIIs, transferring in the process their land, livestock and machinery to

⁴ Officially the quota was: up to 2 cows with calves, 2 sows with offspring, 5 sheep with 5 lambs and up to the age of 11 months an unlimited amount of goats, poultry, rabbits and other small animals as well as 10 beehives.

collective control. In theory contributions to the wealth of the LPG in excess of the minimum (set generally at 500 marks) were to be eventually repaid: the inconsistency with which this was done however became a lasting source of anger among LPG members, who continued to call for payment of money owed them by the state since 1960 right up to 1990.⁵

Although there was some choice in the type of LPG farmers joined – as long as they joined one – it was certainly constrained in some cases by practical considerations (i.e. ensuring an LPG's financial stability or the adjacency of members' lands) as well as the degree to which collectivisation was pursued as a means of social engineering. Most often more than one LPG existed in a single community but the constellation of farms in each one did not necessarily reflect a harmonious balance between the interests of each of the members.

The Roots of Conflict in the LPG

The administrative collectivisation of agriculture represented a considerable step in the social reconfiguration of rural society in the GDR. It rarely gave rise however to newly harmonious social relations within the village. Rather old conflicts were given new form and new vigour. Between 1945 and 1960 the social structure of villages in *Bezirk* Erfurt had been shaped by the influx of refugees from the east and the expansion of industry as well as the gradual erosion of the local authority of the traditional village elites. The collectivisation process during the 1950s, the exodus of people to the West, the development of the MTS and the influx of industrial workers to work in the LPGs as part of a state-sponsored programme as well as consistent efforts to limit the influence of the local pastors over the rural population among other things complicated the network of social relations and loyalties in many villages. Beneath the blanket of administrative full collectivisation in 1960 a tangled set of antagonisms continued to thus exist within and

⁵ See for example the anonymous threat by farmers to Werner Felfe, the Politburo member responsible for agriculture in 1982: "for approximately 30 years we have been waiting for the payment of the additional inventory contribution brought into the LPG. So now you as a powerful man get moving on this. This is what the farmers of not just the northern Bezirke expect." SAPMO B-Arch DY 30/294 Büro Werner Felfe 14.5.1982 Anonyme Eingabe an Herrn Felfe: „Wie man uns sagte....“

between the various LPGs based on politics, religion, class and the rights of new and old settlers.⁶

While one has to be wary of simply accepting the designations of socialist rhetoric as corresponding to the real roots of conflict within rural communities, it is reasonable to accept that in some LPGs those who saw themselves as victims or opponents and those who were beneficiaries and supporters of socialist agricultural policy were perforce brought together within the collective farms. *Grossbauern* had now to work together with those whom they had once considered their social inferiors and accept not only the common use of their property but also their newly non-elite status. Although compelled to be part of the LPGs, some wealthier farmers sought where possible to continue to assert themselves, threatening non-cooperation when attempts were made to reduce their share of the LPG's income on the basis of the land they had contributed.⁷ Attempts to implement the statutory right of the members' assembly to set limits on the proportion of land and number of animals which were deemed to belong to any individual member also provoked considerable resistance. By October 1960 the restriction of wealthier farmers' property had not been completed in any of the districts in the *Bezirk*. In *Kreis* Weimar only 8 out of a possible 80 individual farmers and in *Kreis* Heiligenstadt not a single farmer had had his property curtailed. *Grossbauern* in the LPG Pfiffelbach, *Kreis* Apolda, sought for example to undermine attempts to reduce the number of livestock they owned privately by agreeing that the LPG could take their animals but refusing absolutely to agree to contract the use of their livestock sheds to the LPG even though these buildings would then stand empty.⁸ In the long run *Grossbauern* did have to accept that their buildings and animals were for the most part at the disposal of the collective; actually carrying it out however provoked confrontation which few LPG leaders relished. In a few cases faced with what they saw as blatant invasion of private property and daylight robbery, individual farmers put up some last ditch resistance: a farmer in the LPG Type III Hardisleben faced with the prospect of the LPG converting his sheep pen into cattle stalls was reported to have tried to prevent it saying: "you aren't coming into my stables. That's

⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 103 SED Bezirksleitung BPKK, Aktennotiz – Betr: Lage im Kr. Sömmerda, Bezug: Mitteilung der staatlichen Kontrolle über Feindtätigkeit im Kr. Sömmerda 6.10.1960: "Es herrscht das Argument vor: "Das fremde Zieg (Zeug) muss raus!"

⁷ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 53/61 8.6.1961 p.30.

⁸ ThHStAW RdB L562 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Unterabteilung LPG, Einschätzung der politischen und ökonomischen Entwicklung der LPG des Bezirkes Erfurt 5.10.1962.

my property, you just want to expropriate it. Anyway this LPG isn't going to last much longer.”⁹ Even in late 1961, a farmer in the village of Daasdorf was so angered by the transference of his animals from his sheds to collective livestock holdings that he was reportedly moved to threaten the livestock brigadier, saying “just you wait, when things are different, it'll be your turn.”¹⁰

Even where the questions of lost property and status were not writ large, social divides between successful private farmers and the *Neubauern*, small farmers and agricultural labourers who had founded the LPG could be enough cause for conflict.¹¹ Antagonism came not simply from those who were unwilling to collectivise. Indeed even assessments by SED functionaries appear almost as quick to highlight and condemn instances of sectarianism by long-standing LPG members and small farmers almost as often as they condemn the machinations of the “class enemy”. Long-standing LPG members were not necessarily willing to share what they had achieved with those who until recently had looked down on their efforts and who (initially at least) certainly did not share their politics or their interests in the success of the LPG. Furthermore smaller farmers who until March 1960 had nonetheless managed to run a successful farm had no desire now to be under the command of either their richer neighbours in the LPG Type I or what they regarded as inferior farmers in the LPG Type III.¹²

A major source of conflict between members in the LPGs was the balance between the manpower supplied by each household and the amount of land brought in. As long as one member of the household joined the LPG along with the farm, the whole household had the benefit of the half hectare of individual land while other relations were free to tend privately kept livestock or pursue careers outside farming. In the first year after the socialist spring it was a regular source of antagonism in some LPGs that the wives and children of farmers who had contributed a large amount of land could nevertheless not be made to take part in helping to cultivate it. Small farmers found themselves thus farming the lands of their wealthier neighbours (who still received a share of the profits according to the land they had contributed) and yet unable to achieve nearly as good an income. In

⁹ ThHStAW BPKK BIV/2/4 – 58, SED KL Sömmerda an die BPKK, Erfurt, Feindarbeit im I. Quartal 1961, 17.4.1961 p.169.

¹⁰ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Kreisdienststelle Weimar 379, Abschrift Analyse Gemeinde Daasdorf am Berg 11.10.1961 p.70.

¹¹ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 25/60, Auswertung der Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft zur Beurteilung der Lage 20.5.1960.

¹² ThHStAW RdB L590 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Entwicklung der LPG des Typ I im Bezirk Erfurt 6.7.1960.

the LPG Type II in Nöda, *Kreis* Erfurt complaints were made by former *Kleinbauern* (small-scale farmers) against two *Grossbauern* whose wives and children had avoided joining the LPG. The daughters of one of these farmers had found lucrative office jobs instead of farm work and thus appeared, it was argued, to be enriching themselves on the backs of their poorer neighbours.¹³ In particular, that some farmers' wives were able to hold themselves aloof from the women who went to work in the LPG seemed to highlight the failure of collectivisation to change the social inequalities of the village. With regard to the LPG Rudisleben it was reported for example that the LPG members were minded not to let their wives work in the fields, as the wives of the former *Grossbauern* did no such thing either. Their complaint was given greater force by their wives' objections to the dictatorial manner of the deputising field brigadier who happened also to be the son of one of the ex-*Grossbauern*.¹⁴

Given these tensions, those members of the LPG who were chosen or persuaded to take up leading functions often soon found themselves unable to organise the collective farm efficiently. In the months after the completion of the collectivisation campaign several newly appointed chairmen and brigadiers chose to resign, claiming a lack of confidence in their own abilities to carry out the tasks required of them.¹⁵ Certainly running an LPG was a considerable burden with very little material reward being offered in return. The work was not made more attractive by the potential for antagonism and social exclusion at the hands of one's colleagues and neighbours, nor by having to face the wrath of the district agricultural functionaries, especially if the LPGs were failing economically or the members were openly failing to adhere to the statute. LPG functionaries understandably found their unaccustomed leadership duties, caught between their responsibilities and obligations to those above and beneath them in the new hierarchy, difficult to bear. For example a field brigadier resigned from his post in the LPG Type III Windeberg *Kreis* Mühlhausen reportedly on the grounds that he regularly had difficulties assigning work to the members who often did not obey his instructions.¹⁶ In May 1960 the aggrieved chairman of an LPG in *Kreis* Nordhausen sent a letter of

¹³ ThHStAW BDVP 20/247 VPKA Erfurt Operativstab, Berichterstattung an die BDVP über die polizeiliche Lage bei der soz. Umgestaltung der Landwirtschaft 18.7.1960.

¹⁴ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information über Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 19/60 4.5.1960.

¹⁵ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 36/60, Einschätzung der Lage in der Landwirtschaft 20.7.1960; Information über vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 19/60 4.5.1960.

¹⁶ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 62/61 Landwirtschaft 5.8.1961 p.43.

resignation to the local mayor on the basis that he could not continue unless he had the confidence of the members.¹⁷ Particularly after the harvest in autumn 1960, the boards of the newly formed LPGs appeared in Worbis, Heiligenstadt and Mühlhausen districts to lapse entirely. The main reason given for board members to resign from their positions as functionaries was the desire to “live peacefully” like the other members.¹⁸

Ideally, the SED leadership hoped to be able to consolidate the LPGs rapidly, implement the model statutes and achieve the leap forward in agricultural production which had been a strong motivation for the hasty completion of the collectivisation campaign. The actual state of affairs in most new LPGs and many older ones in April 1960 made the realisation of these goals highly unlikely. In the long term, the collectivisation campaign and its aftermath were useful to the SED regime in the extent to which it identified those individuals on whom it could rely and exposed those aspects of its administration of agriculture and rural communities which were ineffective, inefficient or unreliable. The zeal with which some agitators had advanced the cause of collectivisation was a sign that the regime could call upon some loyal and obedient proponents of socialist transformation. Particularly those who lived or worked in rural communities and thus had campaigned and supported the formation of LPGs at the risk of lasting opprobrium from their neighbours and colleagues had demonstrated the existence of a base for support for socialist agricultural policy on which more secure foundations might be built. Those anxious to see that collectivisation worked well were however few in number compared to the majority of LPG members who regarded a future in the collective farm without enthusiasm, if not with varying degrees of resistance and in some cases open opposition. The means at the SED's disposal for overcoming such negative responses to the LPG (provoked in part by the speed and aggressiveness with which the campaign had been conducted) were greatly limited. Implementing collective practices and suppressing dissent had to be carried out if the collectivisation were to have any positive benefit in the long term. In the short term, the apparatus available on the ground for achieving these goals however was insufficient given the size of the task, while resistance to implementing and the subversion of collective practices were particularly

¹⁷ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Auswertung der Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 20/60.

¹⁸ ThHStAW RdB L562 Abt. Landwirtschaft Unterabteilung LPG, Einschätzung der politischen und ökonomischen Entwicklung der LPG des Bezirkes Erfurt 5.10.1962.

strong as a result of the widespread uncertainty over the future of collective farming and the GDR itself.

The Insufficiency of the SED State's Apparatus in Rural Communities

In the previous chapter detailing the course of the collectivisation process in *Bezirk Erfurt* it became clear that the local apparatus of the regime was able to achieve only a limited degree of success in persuading farmers to join or form an LPG. In order for the rapid completion of full collectivisation to be achieved (albeit on paper only), a massive effort had been necessary in which large numbers of agitators from outside farming or the immediate community were deployed. LPGs had thus been formed (or expanded) often without the absolute backing of large sections of the local state administration and the politically organised population in the village. The campaign for full collectivisation had been marked in its last months primarily too by the prioritisation of speed rather than thoroughness. The aggressive tactics employed during the collectivisation had succeeded in 'persuading' farmers to sign up to an LPG, but local administrations and the LPGs themselves remained largely lacking in suitable (politically loyal and technically expert) staff and resources to ensure the collective farms functioned in practice. Attempts to consolidate the newly formed collective farms and stabilise agriculture in the aftermath of collectivisation were thus compromised both by the widespread dissent among farmers with regard to the LPGs and by an apparatus of local administration and control ill-equipped either to assuage or control this dissent and ineffective at establishing and sustaining collective farming in accordance with the statutes.

As early as April 1960 a brigade of investigators was organised by the SED *Bezirksleitung* to assess the effectiveness of the local party and state apparatus in *Kreis Apolda*. Its main task was to "put the work of the party and leadership by the SED *Kreisleitung* and by the state apparatus in order and mobilise all forces in the inclusion of large sections of the population in the socialist development of the district". It found much to criticise. The SED *Kreisleitung*, in lacking an overview of the situation in the district, had not only failed to practice its leading role with regard to the state apparatus and the mass organisations but had also been negligent in giving suitable guidance to the SED

party organisations in the villages and LPGs. As far as the state apparatus was concerned the brigade also found evidence of serious ideological weakness, particularly among those functionaries belonging to the CDU and LDPD (Liberal Democratic Party) who did not always appear to recognise the leading role of the SED. Leading functionaries in the *Rat des Kreises* were deemed to have an “unclear” attitude towards collectivisation. Their “lazy liberalism”, it was suggested, had allowed mayors unnecessarily to lower the plan targets due from farmers in the *Bezirk*. Moreover 15 out of 47 village mayors were considered in need of replacement by cadres better equipped to cope with the sorts of political and technical matters which now faced local functionaries since the completion of collectivisation.¹⁹ While this state of affairs was recognised there were limits to what could be done to rectify the situation. In *Kreis Apolda* for example, it was ultimately pointed out, that fifteen suitable replacements for mayor simply did not exist.²⁰

The lack of personnel was a serious problem throughout the agricultural and rural administration. Immediately following the establishment of a fully collectivised village, the SED *Bezirksleitung* had directed the operative committees for collectivisation to delegate groups of specialists, agronomic experts as well as experienced farmers from the VEGs (*Volkseigene Güter* i.e. State Owned Farms) and long established LPGs in order to ensure that “the organisation of work is taken properly into hand in collective farms”.²¹ Following the announcement of full collectivisation, a number of local brigades of specialists were thus deployed in some LPGs. These were however clearly not sufficient in number to monitor the progress of all the LPGs all of the time. Investigations at the end of June into the cultivation plans for the upcoming harvest revealed not only rejection of the state directives on the planting of certain crops but also widespread breakdown in collective work. As a consequence calls were made for the immediate redeployment of large numbers of trouble-shooting brigades throughout the *Bezirk*.²² A report on the state of the LPGs compiled by the *Rat des Bezirks* in July 1960 summarised the situation in *Bezirk Erfurt* just after collectivisation. Out of the 1,390 LPGs then officially registered in the *Bezirk*, over 40% were Type I LPGs which had been formed over the last three

¹⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-328 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Vorlage, An das Büro der Bezirksleitung: Bericht über den Einsatz der Brigade der Bezirksleitung im Kreis Apolda. 2.5.1960. pp.6-16.

²⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-328 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Beschluss Protokoll, Beitrag Genosse Asmus. pp.17-19.

²¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/2-322 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Beschluss-Protokoll Nr. 10/60 der Sekretariatssitzung, Fernschreiben von der SED Bezirksleitung an alle 1. Kreissekretäre 21.3.1960. p.140.

²² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-338 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, RdB Abt. Land, Erf u. Forst: Bericht über die Durchführung des Maisanbaukontrolle vom 25.-30.6.60 im Bezirk Erfurt 13.7.1960. pp.115-117.

months. Somewhat optimistically attributing most of the problems within the collectives to a lack of clarity on political questions - which it asserted simple explanation could resolve – the report suggested that serious difficulties existed in only seventy Type I LPGs, where the transition to collective farming had not been “entirely completed”.²³ This was however something of an understatement – opposition to collective farming was much deeper and much more widespread and the structures in place to control it much weaker than the report gave credit.

In July the SED *Bezirksleitung* drew up plans for the organisation of brigades to assess developments in the 68 villages of *Kreis Nordhausen*. It planned for the deployment of 2 to 3 people in each village. The *Rat des Kreises* was required to provide one person for each of these groups while the rest were to come from various departments of the *Rat des Bezirks*, the MTS, VEGs and the technical colleges in Erfurt and Eisenach. Among their main tasks was analysis of the constitution and working style of local government and the effectiveness of relations between the LPGs and the district and village state apparatus.²⁴ In the reports of these groups, there was damning criticism of the way in which the staff in the *Rat des Kreises* and the village mayors treated the LPGs in the district. The charge of “liberalism” was directed at state functionaries who had clearly done little to prevent farmers from abandoning collective practices and farming individually. The closing report on the activities of the investigating brigade in *Kreis Nordhausen* from the end of September 1960 paints a picture of incompetence or at least inactivity from a surprisingly large number of local functionaries. Most seriously in the villages of Ilfeld and Niedersachswerfen, newly formed LPGs had been left entirely to their own devices. ‘Liberalism’ was considered to be widespread in the district apparatus, infecting leading SED members in the village as well as infecting the state village councils through to the MTS and the agricultural office of the SED *Kreisleitung*. The brigade’s remedy for the situation in the village of Ilfeld, where it was thought an anti-collectivisation and an anti-regime sentiment was particularly virulent, demonstrated how far it thought the district authorities had allowed things to slip. It took administrative action to alter the management of the LPG, removing the chairman from his post, and

²³ ThHStAW L590 RdB Abt. Landwirtschaft Einschätzung der Entwicklung der LPG des Typ I im Bezirk Erfurt 6.7.1960.

²⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-335 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung Konzeption für den Einsatz der Brigade zur Verbesserung der staatlichen Leitungstätigkeit auf dem Gebiete der Landwirtschaft. 4.7.1960 pp.57-58.

making an example of him in the newspaper as “an enemy of the people”. The LPG Type I was then also merged together with the Type II - with no suggestion here of any consideration given to any ballot of the members as demanded in theory by the stipulations of ‘collective democracy’. In the district at large 120 instructors were deployed by the *Rat des Bezirkes* in the villages to put a stop to the inefficiency of MTS functionaries and village mayors, a small number of whom had to be sacked. Given the lack of suitable replacements however, the majority were upbraided and given instructions to scrutinise the production levels of the LPGs and to be more assertive at LPG members’ assemblies and meetings of the LPG board.²⁵ In October 1960 all the state administrations in the districts but especially in *Kreis Apolda*, *Sömmerda*, *Heiligenstadt* and *Sondershausen* were highlighted in a report for having failed to have a direct influence on the new LPGs Types I and II. Along with the lack of suitable mayors, in some (MTS) regions in the districts it was noted for example that there was no one available to instruct the LPGs on how to organise their finances. In one MTS area the instructor was left with the impossible task of overseeing the work done in 46 LPGs.²⁶

Although trouble-shooting brigades continued to operate in LPGs around the *Bezirk*, with the departure in early summer of the majority of the agitators for collectivisation, rejection of collective farming reasserted itself in villages across the *Bezirk*. Open discussion of the intention to harvest individually was liable, if reported, to result in some form of investigation. However there were limits to the ability or desire of local state functionaries to penetrate sufficiently what was taking place in the many small, new LPGs which had just been formed. In the *Bezirk* as a whole it was estimated that approximately 50% of the newly founded LPGs of Type I/II had failed to adhere to the model LPG statute during the harvest.²⁷ It is likely however than the actual proportion was somewhat higher. Unless subjected to repeated close investigation, it could not necessarily be established whether farmers nominally in an LPG were continuing to farm independently of one another or not. Documentary evidence of the collective administration of the LPG – such as the fulfilment of plan requirements, division of profits

²⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-338 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokollauszug – Sekretariatssitzung - Brigade in Nordhausen 18.7.1960 p.22; SED BPA IV/2/3-348 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Brigade Nordhausen der Bezirksleitung Abschlussbericht über den Brigadeinsatz im Kreis Nordhausen 28.9.1960 pp.77-87.

²⁶ ThHStAW RdB L562 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Unterabteilung LPG, Einschätzung der politischen und ökonomischen Entwicklung der LPG des Bezirkes Erfurt 5.10.1962.

²⁷ ThHStAW RdB L562 Abt. Landwirtschaft Unterabteilung LPG, Einschätzung der politischen und ökonomischen Entwicklung der LPG des Bezirkes Erfurt. 5.10.1960.

according to work units and proportions of land – could be supplied to the relevant officials at local and district level without necessarily changing anything in practice. One LPG in *Kreis Arnstadt* managed to work in this way successfully for two years before being discovered.²⁸ In some parts of the *Bezirk*, failure to adhere to the model statutes was the rule rather than the exception – illustrating clearly the impotence of the local outposts of regime authority. In 1960 almost all farmers in Type I LPGs in the districts of Heiligenstadt and Worbis, were reported to have harvested individually.²⁹ It was clear that above all in these strictly Catholic rural areas, local village functionaries, including members of both the SED and CDU, were not able themselves to enforce the implementation of regime policy alone. Certainly in *Kreis Heiligenstadt* in early 1961, it was noted that even SED members acted still too much under the influence of priests and members of the church boards and were unwilling to destroy their relationships with family and friends by openly advocating the party line.³⁰

Despite the shortage of ideologically and technically suitable local functionaries willing or able to enforce adherence to the statutes, the attempt was made to ensure that the size of the harvest would not be damaged and that LPG functionaries would be held to account for any severe drop in yields. Party members from rural SED organisations along with tractor drivers from the MTS were given the task of attending board meetings and members' assemblies of the LPGs throughout the harvest period. Wherever they reported an element of conflict or uncertainty about how (or rather according to whose rules) the harvest was to be brought in, representatives of the local party, the state apparatus, as well as leading figures from the MTS and factories which had been given responsibility for the political and material wellbeing of certain LPGs, were to meet to provide sufficient labour (bands of so-called "harvest helpers") and agree a definite plan to ensure crops were harvested as quickly as possible regardless of LPG members' attitudes.³¹

Throughout the harvest season, operative committees based in the MTS as well as in the district administration oversaw the deployment of groups of several hundred auxiliary harvest workers and pressed mayors and LPG chairmen for progress reports. The

²⁸ ThHStAW RdB L590 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Entwicklung der LPG des Typ I im Bezirk Erfurt 6.7.1960.

²⁹ ThHStAW RdB L562 Abt. Landwirtschaft Unterabteilung LPG, Einschätzung der politischen und ökonomischen Entwicklung der LPG des Bezirkes Erfurt 5.10.1962.

³⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 59 SED Kreisleitung Heiligenstadt an die BPKK, Einschätzung über die Feindarbeit im Kreis im 2. Quartal 1961. 30.6.1961 p.455.

³¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-335 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Abt. Landwirtschaft an das Sekretariat, Informatorischer Bericht über den Tag der Erntebereitschaft 4.7.1960. p.5.

impact of these operative committees varied from district to district, depending on the competence of the local and district functionaries themselves and on the reception their measures received from LPG members on the ground. These in turn were contingent to some extent upon the proximity of centres of SED authority and in part on the suitability of collective farming for local conditions. The agricultural authorities in *Kreis* Erfurt-Land in particular were praised by the *Bezirk* for having succeeded in organising on site troubleshooting brigades in almost every village as early as the beginning of August 1960. *Kreis* Bad Langensalza was also reported to have been successful at organising the harvest through the operative committees. Further away from the *Bezirk*'s arable heartland and the *Bezirk*'s capital, however, the picture worsened. In *Kreis* Gotha it was noted that MTS functionaries were not forceful enough in persuading LPG members to adhere to deadlines and in *Kreis* Mühlhausen the harvest had only been brought in "on time" thanks to the deployment of Soviet and NVA troops as farm labourers.³²

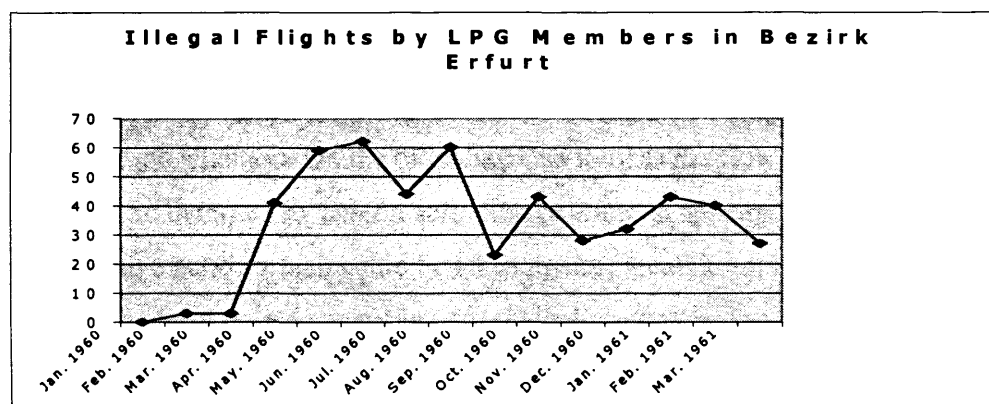
The stability of the supply of food was (particularly since the uprising of June 1953) felt at all levels of the SED to be tied directly to the stability of the GDR as a whole. While this fact was precisely the reason for strict police control and for deep suspicion of and potentially severe punishments for serious drops in production levels, it was also the basis for a more limited repressive response to resistance to collective farming practices, where this did not immediately undermine production. The manner in which the campaign for full collectivisation had occurred undoubtedly cowed many of those who had opposed it – farmers and functionaries alike. But farmers were not in an entirely powerless position. Not only was their active participation in collective practices necessary to the survival of the LPGs in the long term, in the short term farmers, along with the rest of the population, were in a position to vote with their feet and abandon the GDR.

Flight to the West

Up to the construction of the Berlin wall, fleeing to the west, while still considered risky, was nonetheless an option chosen by a large number of farmers who felt that they had little to lose in abandoning the farm once collectivisation seemed inevitable. In addition large numbers of young people saw no future in agriculture and hoped for better working

³² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-345 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Abt. Org/Kader, Einschätzung der Bürositzungen vom 2.9.1960 und Ablauf der Halmfruchtermte 13.9.1960 p.86.

conditions in the west.³³ Month after month following collectivisation, LPG members constituted a significant proportion of those fleeing the GDR. In April and May 1960 78 LPG members, 27 employees of the MTS and the VdGB along with 59 women and 83 children were recorded to have fled the *Bezirk*. In July and August 1960 a further 104 farmers are recorded as having fled the republic.³⁴ In the border areas of the *Bezirk*, especially in the northern Catholic Eichsfeld, whole villages which had close links with the population just across the border absented themselves. In one village in *Kreis Apolda*, three farmers fled with their families during the collectivisation campaign having been denied the chance to set up an LPG on their own separate to the one already established.³⁵ As statistics on the numbers of people working in agriculture in *Bezirk Erfurt* who successfully fled to the West show, the culmination of the collectivisation process resulted in a sustained increase in flights during the summer months – despite some small decline during the high point of the harvest season, when it might be assumed fewer dared to go unaccounted for. As in the rest of the GDR, numbers of people abandoning agriculture in the *Bezirk* to flee to the West did decline slightly during the autumn and winter of 1960. However throughout the first half of 1961 the number of flights by LPG members in *Bezirk Erfurt* each month remained high [see Figure 1. below].

Figure 1.³⁶

In the opinion of the ZK's agricultural department the reason for the rapid increase in flights was the basic neglect of the politics of the village by the district authorities with the

³³ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 58 SED Kreisleitung Sondershausen an die BPKK, Erfurt, Bericht 15.4.1961. p.160

³⁴ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information über Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 28/60 21.6.1960; ThHStAW SED-BPA IV/2/3-345 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Von der Abt. f. Sicherheitsfragen: Bericht über die Republikflüchte, Rückkehrer, Erstzuziehenden und die legalen Verzüge im Monat August 1960 in Gegenüberstellung zum Vormonat. 13.9.1960. p.133

³⁵ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/361 VPKA Apolda, Abt. S. Analyse über die Klassenkampfsituation der Gemeinde Stobra ?4.1961 p.161.

³⁶ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/J IV 2/3 J/190 ZK der SED – Sekretariat, Information der Abteilung Landwirtschaft beim ZK, Einschätzung der Republikflucht auf dem Gebiet der Landwirtschaft.

conclusion of the collectivisation campaign. Even the *Kreisleitungen* of the SED were considered to be wholly incompetent on the question of illegal flights, with only sporadic attempts to investigate and analyse cases. Village functionaries, notably the mayor or the party secretary of the local party organisation, reportedly failed of their own accord to react to cases of illegal flights.³⁷ In cases where leading LPG functionaries had fled, a more serious interpretation was put on the event. The flight of accountants from LPGs in *Kreis* Gotha and *Kreis* Erfurt-Land and of an LPG chairman in *Kreis* Sondershausen in January 1961 were regarded as deliberate attempts to sow discord amongst the remaining members of the LPG.³⁸ However the flight of less conspicuous figures in the LPG received less attention.

The effect on agriculture of this steady exodus was severe in some localities with the task of managing abandoned farms falling to the often undermanned and under-funded LPGs. The parlous state of the buildings and land left behind, and the insufficiency of machinery and labour to farm such abandoned fields and look after livestock meant they were more of a burden than a boon to the LPGs. The threat to leave for the west and the potential to do so as long as security measures along the border were still relatively lax no doubt influenced how the collectives were seen by the LPG members and how they were treated by the hierarchy of state and party functionaries. On the one hand, while it was still possible to get out of the GDR, farmers did not necessarily think of abandoning their property for as long as they could hope that changes would occur in international politics to reverse the situation. On the other hand, so long as the flow of farmers to the West could not be dammed by careful surveillance alone, it appears limits were set to the level of repressive action which could be taken against recalcitrant LPG members.

The local police constable (*Abschnittsbevollmächtigte* or ABV) had considerable responsibilities for overseeing the consolidation of the LPGs, in exposing and reporting any actions by LPG members which could be construed as detrimental to the collective farm or indeed the state. The *Bezirk* police authority (*Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei* or BDVP) worked according to the supposition that there was massive “hostile activity” in the LPGs in the aftermath of collectivisation; it was just a question of

³⁷ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/J IV 2/3 J/190 ZK der SED – Sekretariat, Information der Abteilung Landwirtschaft beim ZK, Einschätzung der Republikflucht auf dem Gebiet der Landwirtschaft.

³⁸ ThHStAW RdB L591 Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht an die Bezirksleitung der SED, Sekretariat, Stand der Jahresabrechnungen, Rechenschaftslegungen und Neuwahlen in den LPG Stichtag 1.2.61. 3.2.1961.

whether their officers were competent enough to recognise it. The range of potentially serious crimes for which individuals could be charged was sufficiently broad to intimidate most dissenting farmers into avoiding any virulent or public demonstrations of opposition. However, despite the guidelines, there was at times a clear gulf between the desired attitude of local police and what they were willing to do or capable of in practice. Policemen at district and village level had to be repeatedly criticised for failing to take ‘class conflict’ into account when investigating the situation in agriculture and rural communities. The chief of the department for criminal matters in the district police office (*Volkspolizeikreisamt* or VPKA) Arnstadt in November 1960 was criticised for attributing findings of livestock mortality, bad practice by state functionaries and problems in the LPGs to “organisational” and “objective” causes. The investigating brigade from the BDVP pointed out that in so doing he had entirely neglected the question of class conflict. The brigade also reported that other officers in the department appeared too to have misunderstood the meaning of class conflict, believing that with the removal of the hostile classes, [i.e. through collectivisation] the conflict was over.³⁹ A report by instructors on the work of the VPKA Eisenach in September 1960 commented with what seems like sarcastic understatement:

Although in many villages in *Kreis* Eisenach collective work has not been implemented and the people themselves suggest that farmers are being influenced ideologically by western television and western radio; although livestock mortality is continuing to increase and the number of illegal flights from the Republic by people we are interested in has increased, there has so far been no success at uncovering hostile activity.⁴⁰

A set of guidelines issued in April 1960 by the Interior Ministry to local police constables indicated which crimes they should expect and prepare to prevent in the newly fully collectivised villages and LPGs. Above all, production levels were to be maintained through careful vigilance against any form of sabotage, while young people were to be prevented from succumbing to hostile influences (presumably in a bid to prevent their

³⁹ ThHStAW BDVP 20/044 Politabteilung, Bericht über den Brigadeinsatz im VPKA Arnstadt in der Zeit vom 8.11.-12.11.1960, 26.11.1960.

⁴⁰ ThHStAW BDVP 20/044 Politabteilung, Bericht über den Instrukteureinsatz im VPKA Eisenach vom 14.9.-23.9.1960, 30.9.1960.

flight to the West).⁴¹ Combating livestock mortality in particular was to be seen in the context of a class struggle in which almost any premature death could be construed as a deliberate act masquerading as neglect or incompetence from a member of an LPG. Despite the suspicion with which instances of damage to crops and livestock were treated, it is debatable how much was deliberate sabotage. Potentially opponents of collectivisation might have wished to demonstrate the un-viability of an LPG by aggravating any negative consequences for agricultural production levels which had arisen. Potentially too farmers planning to flee the country might have had an interest in destroying their property before it was 'taken over by the state'. However, in the majority of cases which received serious investigation in *Bezirk* Erfurt, supposed acts of wanton destruction of crops or livestock could not be proven to have been the result of hostile intentions.⁴² Arguably the intention behind the scrutiny of instances of severe production losses was as much concerned with providing LPG members with an additional incentive – based on fear of arrest - to maintain production levels. Nonetheless acts of petty sabotage did occur in the LPGs, alongside less subtle demonstrations of hostility toward the LPG and the SED dictatorship in general, including threats and acts of violence against those who had supported collectivisation. In an extreme case in a village in *Kreis* Eisenach in September 1960 it was reported that a loudspeaker car containing agitators was reportedly set upon by 25 to 30 people, one of whom threatened to set it on fire.⁴³

While such acts were no doubt borne of frustration and despair, less extreme demonstrations of public opposition were arguably prompted too by some expectation that something might really be gained by them. Given the sense of uncertainty about the future status of Germany or doubts as to the permanence of collective farming, actions which undermined the LPG or demonstrated farmers' dissatisfaction were not necessarily considered to be vain gestures. In May 1960 a village mayor was reportedly asked whether "he wasn't afraid if things were to change since what he has done to the farmers in recent weeks can't be made good and he is now hated by everyone".⁴⁴ At an assembly in the LPG Type III Wasserthaleben in *Kreis* Sondershausen in May 1960 calls were made for

⁴¹ ThHStAW BDVP 20/081, Stab/Operativstab Arbeitshinweise zu den Aufgaben der Volkspolizei in den vollgenossenschaftlichen Dörfern auf der Grundlage der Direktive des Ministers des Innern Nr. 4/60 19.4.1960.

⁴² ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 39/60 26.7.1960.

⁴³ ThHStAW BDVP 20/044 Politabteilung, VPKA Eisenach, Einschätzung der Feindtätigkeit im Kreis Eisenach 9.9.1960.

⁴⁴ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information über Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 19/60 4.5.1960.

the introduction of free elections, arguing that at least then farmers would not have to be in the LPG.⁴⁵ Similarly in an assembly of the LPG “*Fortschritt*” (“Progress”) in May 1960 in Kindelbrück two farmers were cheered when they announced to representatives of the *Rat des Kreises Sömmerda* that they had been forced into the LPG.⁴⁶

The first year after the end of the collectivisation campaign saw a tangle of recrimination, repression and conciliation, as farmers, LPG functionaries and local, district and regional representatives of the regime attempted to assert or protect their often all too divergent interests. While there was enough uncertainty with regard to the permanence of the collective farm and indeed the GDR itself, those who sought to limit the impact of the proclaimed collectivisation on the conditions in which they lived and worked were well provided with motivation and opportunity to do so.

The Strength of Popular Dissent

It was clear that the apparatus of agricultural administration from the (often reluctant) LPG functionaries and the (liberal) local and district state authorities right up to the SED leadership in Berlin was neither consistently able nor always willing in the first year after full collectivisation to take repressive action to control widespread disregard for collective farming. At the same time throughout 1960 rumours spread regularly throughout the countryside in *Bezirk* Erfurt that collectivisation might soon be abandoned, that the Americans might return to Thuringia or more vaguely that “things will be different soon”.⁴⁷ In Gierstädt, *Kreis* Erfurt-Land, some farmers reportedly even raised the spectre of the 17th June 1953 uprising, stating that on this date in 1960 something would happen which would help farmers get their land back.⁴⁸ Against this background of uncertainty and instability, the potential benefits of resisting collectivisation, whether by openly rejecting it or more carefully subverting it, outweighed the potential repercussions.

In the initial weeks and months after the completion of the collectivisation campaign, a wave of withdrawals from the LPGs came from those farmers who had recently been pressured into joining.⁴⁹ The right to withdraw from the collective had been initially

⁴⁵ ThHStAW BDVP 20/044 Politabteilung, VPKA Eisenach, Einschätzung der Feindtätigkeit im Kreis Eisenach 9.9.1960.

⁴⁶ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information über Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 24/60 20.5.1960.

⁴⁷ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 36/60, Einschätzung der Lage in der Landwirtschaft 20.7.1960.

⁴⁸ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 32/60, 6.7.1960.

⁴⁹ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 41/60, Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 26.7.1960.

allowed for in the statutes of all types of LPGs. In theory any departure had to be voted on by the membership and entailed the return of only an equivalent sized piece of land on the edge of the LPG. Nevertheless LPG members made use of this right to withdraw, reclaiming their own land in spite of the statute. The lack of an explicit law making refusal to participate in an LPG illegal had added to the grievances of private farmers required to sign declarations of “voluntary” entry. In this context withdrawal was an equally “voluntary” refusal to participate in the LPG any longer. The reports detailing the flow of withdrawals indicate that in the vast majority of cases, sufficient pressure and persuasion could be brought to bear to induce membership to be taken up again. However conflicts were not always quickly resolved. During the first year after the completion of the collectivisation campaign new instances of withdrawal from the LPG were registered periodically in different parts of the *Bezirk*, amounting to as many as 640 in 1960 - of which only 200 had been persuaded to take up membership again by the following year.⁵⁰ Two reports – one from the beginning and one from the end of July 1961 demonstrate the ongoing struggle faced by district functionaries. At the start of the month 57 withdrawals were recorded from LPGs in the *Bezirk*, in addition to 47 withdrawals from gardening collectives in the area of Erfurt-Stadt alone. At the end of the month 199 withdrawals are recorded, with outbreaks in districts which had previously registered none. In only 94 cases had members been successfully persuaded to return to the LPG by the end of the month.⁵¹ Rumours that in the autumn of 1961 the LPGs would be dissolved, were clearly motivation enough for farmers to take the initiative to withdraw again in early 1961 and in the LPG Type Is to terminate contracts on the use of privately owned machinery.⁵² In *Kreis* Worbis in at least nine villages, LPGs appeared to be on the verge of disbanding in July 1961.⁵³

A less confrontational means of protest against and subversion of collectivisation was to limit the extent of one’s active participation. Given that the LPGs relied upon the manpower of the farmers as well as use of their land, tools, machinery and livestock, it was possible to undermine their economic stability very effectively by contributing as

⁵⁰ ThHStAW RdB L591 Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht an die Bezirksleitung der SED Sekretariat, Stand der Jahresabrechnungen, Rechenschaftslegungen und Neuwahlen in den LPG Stichtag 1.2.61. 3.2.1961.

⁵¹ ThHStAW RdB L591 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Unterabteilung LPG, Informatorischer Bericht über Austritte aus den LPG und GPG, 5.7.1961; RdB L591 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Erfassung und Forstwirtschaft, Unterabteilung LPG, Einschätzung der Austrittserklärungen aus den LPG und GPG im Bezirk Erfurt 31.7.1961.

⁵² ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 51/61 Austrittserklärungen und Funktionsniederlegungen 25.07.1961 p.27.

⁵³ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 58/61 Landwirtschaft 28.07.1961 p.38.

little as was possible – within the bounds of the law. Farmers would not allow their barns to be used by the LPG, and were slow to make their machinery available, amid suggestions that they might need them themselves soon.⁵⁴ In the LPG “*Aufbau*” (“Construction”) in Torba, *Kreis* Sondershausen, whose chairman had noted that 70% of the members opposed the collectivisation, the police reported: “a poor work ethic currently predominates here – this is to be seen in the fact that some members have been sick for a fortnight already and no sick notes have been handed in.”⁵⁵ It was also common to refuse to work overtime or on weekends.⁵⁶ Particularly prevalent in police reports too is the deliberate neglect of collective land, while great lengths were taken to look after household plots and livestock. Owing to circumstances in Poland where some collective farms had been allowed to dissolve because they had proved too much of an economic burden for the state, in spring 1961 rumours spread that the same measures might be taken in the GDR if the situation became bad enough. On the basis of this some farmers devoted more effort to strengthening their household farms while allowing the LPG’s land to go untended.⁵⁷ During the 1961 spring cultivation period in *Kreis* Sondershausen farmers were found to have abandoned planting on collective land in a number of LPGs owing to the poor weather and had instead either gone straight to the local pub or off to tend their private land.⁵⁸ In other LPGs, members simply stayed away from work or worked half-heartedly, expectant of change in the none too distant future. Shortly before the building of the Berlin Wall in the summer of 1961 rumours were rife in parts of the *Bezirk* that something momentous was about to change the entire political situation in Germany. In Tiefthal, *Kreis* Erfurt-Land, the CDU mayor reacted to plans to build a communal laundry with the words: “what’s the point of that when everyone is going to get all his stuff back anyway?” In the village of Witterda in *Kreis* Erfurt-Land a large number of LPG members had stopped going to work at the end of July 1961 responding to the rumoured instruction: “work slow, it will be different soon.”⁵⁹

More directly in contravention of the statutes, no action was taken to reorganise or amalgamate fields or transfer livestock into collective sheds. In the upland districts of the

⁵⁴ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 44/60 Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 8.8.1960.

⁵⁵ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information 68/60 Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 9.11.1960.

⁵⁶ Bauer, T. *Blockpartei und Agrarrevolution von Oben. Die DBD 1948-1963* (Munich 2003) pp.506-7.

⁵⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 58 SED Kreisleitung Sondershausen an die BPKK, Bericht 15.4.1961 p.160.

⁵⁸ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 51/61 1.6.1961 p.25.

⁵⁹ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 59/61 29.07.1961 p.40.

Bezirk in particular farmers resisted moves to amalgamate fields - a state of affairs which reportedly local state functionaries did little about.⁶⁰ LPG members failed to divert a proportion of the profits into a common fund – a fundamental requirement for the future development of the LPG, without which not only the establishment of common amenities but also the building of the necessary capital for investment in the tools of industrial production as foreseen by socialist agricultural policy were not possible. In other areas adherence to the statute was not enforced within the LPG, compromises being reached in members' assemblies over aspects of pay and work organisation and the allocation of land for members' gardens and private plots. In the LPG Type I in Wechmar, *Kreis* Gotha the members decided to share profits simply according to the amount of land contributed to the LPG with each member receiving the same wage. This was done on the basis that each member would work "normally" and that there was no need therefore to differentiate.⁶¹ Without the participation of the LPG members in record keeping, the value of the LPG as a means of forcing improved labour productivity and of integrating agricultural production more efficiently into the planned economy was considerably reduced. In several LPGs there were simply no records kept of the numbers of livestock kept in the LPG, or indeed the numbers which had died or been slaughtered.⁶² Members of LPG Type Is sought reportedly too to prevent outside interference in the way they distributed profits by failing to keep records of the work done by members or of the amount of produce they had received as payment in kind. Thus it was difficult to work out a system of performance-related pay or assess exactly what had already be paid out to the members and what should thus be accumulated as capital by the collective. Equally without effective records of production levels and turnover, it was difficult for the members to commit to raising their plan targets for the coming year.⁶³

The strength of dissent was considerable, and remained so while neither collectivisation nor the GDR's future seemed certain. Nevertheless as an institution the LPG could not be discounted. Farmers were confronted constantly by the existence of the

⁶⁰ ThHStAW BDVP 20/081 Stab/Operativstab, Information 59/60 Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 12.10.1960; BDVP, Lagebesprechung am 14.10.1960 zur Einschätzung der Feindtätigkeit auf dem Lande. 17.10.1960.

⁶¹ ThHStAW RdB L590 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Entwicklung der LPG des Typ I im Bezirk Erfurt 6.7.1960.

⁶² B-Arch Abt. DDR DE 1/12164 Zentrale Kommission für Staatliche Kontrolle – Der Vorsitzende, Informationsbericht Nr.7 1.3.1961 p.87; Zentrale Kommission für Staatliche Kontrolle – Der Vorsitzende, Bericht: Bezirk Erfurt – Unrealer Nachweis über Rinderverluste durch die Organe der Zentralverwaltung für Statistik 1.3.1961 p.103.

⁶³ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-362 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft: Informatorischer Bericht über den Stand der Plandiskussion mit dem Stand vom 3.2.1961, 4.2.1961 pp.8-13; BDVP 20/247, VPKA Erfurt, Abt. K – Komm.SE: Bericht über Verbrechen in den Ortsschaften an der Fernverkehrsstrasse IV 5.8.1960.

LPG as the administrative body within which they were organised – through which they were defined as citizens - even in those parts of the country where the collective farm existed in name only. The longer LPGs survived, so the gradual (and often inconsistent and incomprehensive) application of administrative pressure made them an unavoidable part of the reality of farming in the GDR.

The Seeds of Consolidation in the LPG

During September 1960, the SED *Bezirksleitung* sent into the Type I LPGs within the *Bezirk* further brigades made up mostly of students studying agriculture at the technical colleges in Eisenach, Weimar and Nordhausen (although 115 students were recruited from the philosophical faculty at the university of Jena, in neighbouring *Bezirk* Gera). 725 students worked in groups of two or three per LPG under the guidance of the SED *Kreisleitung*'s representative in each of the MTS regions. The tasks set them were considerable: "implementation of the statute and the establishment of internal work ordinances; the introduction of socialist principles of work and performance; realisation of collective democracy; the formation of commissions to establish work norms and performance related pay; creation of the preconditions necessary for collective livestock holdings; and guidance in the creation of a production and finance plan for 1961."⁶⁴ Given the small amount of time (3 weeks) and the enormity of the tasks facing these brigades, it is not surprising that there continued to be many Type I LPGs in which aspects of collective farming had failed to be adopted. Nevertheless the passing of the harvest and the relative quiet of the winter months in agricultural terms provided opportunities for farmers and LPG functionaries to take stock of the situation. The desire to rebel against collectivisation certainly continued to exist; however the LPG as an institution, though hugely flawed, continued to survive too and in so doing grew slowly in stature and permanence. Farmers were certainly still fleeing to the West but the majority who remained, increasingly had to reconcile themselves to the fact they only had a status within the LPG. In order to sell their produce, earn an income and improve the conditions in which they lived and work, there was no alternative other than participating in the structures of the collective farm.

⁶⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-345 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft an das Sekretariat, Einsatz von Studenten und Fachschülern zur Unterstützung der LPG besonders des Typ I im Bezirk Erfurt p.46.

The beginning of the new year saw the holding of the main yearly assemblies in the LPGs. These assemblies – being held for the first time in approximately half of the *Bezirk*'s LPGs – were a crucial test of how far attitudes of LPG members, particularly new ones, had changed over the year. That LPG members were willing to attend the assembly and at least listen to discussions was some sign that the LPGs were recognised as the institution through which action might be taken and their interests articulated. Reports on the discussions held during the assemblies of the LPGs of Types I and II, especially those of the new LPGs, referred to the concentration of the discussions on resolving local problems affecting the community, and avoidance of any ideological or political commentary on the merits of collective farming. In an LPG in Bad Tennstedt *Kreis* Bad Langensalza in March 1961, farmers walked out of the members' assembly during the political speeches of leading *Bezirk* functionaries who had attended as guests, reportedly commenting: "when that fellow in there has finished babbling, we'll go back in to the assembly".⁶⁵ Nevertheless advocates of collective farming – whether LPG functionaries or local representatives of party and state – were too clearly winning (or enforcing) some acceptance of, if not support for, the statutes of the LPGs. There were reports of discussions in LPG Type I on whether to change the ratio of income from 60:40 to 70:30 in favour of work units over land contribution for the coming year. The question of whether meadows and grazing land would be better tended collectively was also raised. Furthermore it was reported that almost all LPGs of Types I and II in *Bezirk* Erfurt had diverted 15% of the farm's profits into an investment fund.⁶⁶ Perhaps still more significantly LPG members in a proportion of Type I LPGs were reported to be backing the restriction of the number of animals and land granted to the wealthier farmers. In other words, LPG members themselves were acting to redistribute the sources of income in their collective more evenly. This suggests if not ideological acceptance of the LPG then at least some practical acceptance of its existence and a willingness to use its structures in their own interests. With the new year came further impetus for the consolidation – at least administratively speaking – of LPGs: reluctant members could no longer reasonably claim the right to harvest individually and it was increasingly difficult for LPG members to

⁶⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-10 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./Kader, Zwischenbericht über die Arbeit der Brigade in Bad Tennstedt pp.267-273.

⁶⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-362 RdB Abt Landwirtschaft, an die SED Bezirksleitung, Stand der Jahresendabrechnungen, Rechenschaftslegungen und Neuwahlen in den LPG – Stichtag 1.2.1961. 3.2.1961 pp.32-39.

separate their interests from those of the LPG as an institution. The allocation of unjust plan targets to the LPG by the *Rat des Kreises* in early 1961 was now a matter of concern for all, even reluctant, members of the collective farms.⁶⁷

Conclusion

In the first year after full collectivisation major initial steps were taken in the reorganisation of agricultural production. The LPG had been introduced and no longer remained a distant possibility but rather increasingly appeared to be a permanent feature of agriculture in the GDR as long as the current regime remained. Despite the numerous setbacks and failures of the first year after full collectivisation, with farmers resistant and functionaries incapable or unwilling to implement collective practices, limited success had been achieved in consolidating the LPG as a lasting, potentially stable institution.⁶⁸ It was clear however that whatever successes had been achieved in reconciling farmers to the LPG, the future development of agriculture in the GDR was by no means certain.

⁶⁷ ThHStAW NF 275 Kreissekretariat Erfurt-Land, Betr. Tel. Durchsage vom 7.2.1961, 8.2.1961 p.9.

⁶⁸ The transfer of some heavy machinery from the MTS to LPG Type III in the fertile flat lands of the Bezirk, above all in Kreis Bad Langensalza, Weimar and Sömmerda, had proved beneficial in improving the profitability of some LPG Type III - for example, ThHStAW RdB L615 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Erfassung und Forstwirtschaft, Ergebnisse der bisher an die LPG Typ III leihweise übergebenen Technik und Schlussfolgerungen für die weitere Übergabe. 22.6.1961.

CHAPTER 3

Farming behind the Wall

“You just want to dominate us, there are so many who think for us now – why so much pressure, we will manage things just as we do every year.”¹ (The complaint of farmers in *Kreis Arnstadt* in September 1962 as functionaries from the district administration sought to control the harvesting of crops.)

On 13th August 1961 the obstacles to an illegal departure from the GDR to West Germany were suddenly made considerably more severe. Along with the Wall running through Berlin, measures were taken to strengthen security along the entire border with West Germany, a considerable part of which ran along the northern and western edges of *Bezirk Erfurt*. Although attempts continued to be made to get across the border by citizens of the GDR – with some limited success in the first weeks after the Wall’s construction – the steady flow of people to the West was brought to an abrupt halt. This brought to an end the drain on manpower and expertise from the GDR which was severely undermining the East German economy as well as any claims the SED regime made to legitimacy. With the economic security lent by the Wall, the prospects for the survival of the GDR under SED dictatorship improved significantly. This security lent the leadership of the SED greater self-confidence in pursuing radical and often unpopular policies and taking punitive action against those it considered hostile. However it also encouraged East Germans as a whole to reassess how to make the best of their lives within the SED dictatorship now that they were deprived of the possibility of an alternative life in the West and the likelihood of reunification had receded significantly. It thus ensured a much increased proportion of the population reconsidered their future in the GDR and were moved to participate in and in so doing sustain and shape the structures and systems of authority by which the SED dictatorship was run over the coming years. There is no doubt that the construction of the Wall was thus a major turning point in the GDR’s social and economic development and had an impact, in both the short and long term, on the way in which the authority of the SED leadership was communicated and understood within East German society.

¹ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-557 Bericht der AG die in Arnstadt zur Ernte eingesetzt ist. 10.9.1962 p.20.

In the past, flight to the West had certainly not been an easy option which citizens of the GDR had taken lightly. This was perhaps especially so for farmers where an inherited or long standing connection and sense of responsibility to the land, to their livestock and to their community could act as an additional restraint on the desire to leave the country. Nonetheless a very large proportion of the population, many of them farmers, had deemed the risks and losses involved in flight to the West worthwhile. For those farmers who had thus far remained in the GDR despite collectivisation, departure to the West was thus always a potential alternative to remaining in the LPG. The complete locking of the border removed this alternative, bringing stability and greater certainty as to the long term survival of the LPG. The subsequent forcible resettlement of “unreliable” villagers away from the border regions too made clear the limits of opposition and the lengths of repression possible in the GDR. Now that the SED leadership could afford to be less tolerant, the test of conscience, loyalty and obedience put to farmers and rural functionaries during the collectivisation campaign was reapplied in August 1961 with still less room for dissent and greater incentive to support the consolidation of the LPG.

The Limits of Dissent

Public outbursts of resentment directed towards the regime or the LPG continued to occur in *Bezirk* Erfurt despite the construction of the Wall. Swastikas were graffitied on LPG buildings and in instances in 1961 and 1962 in *Kreis* Heiligenstadt manure was spread on a field in such a way that a swastika became apparent in a darker shade of green making it visible for miles around.² There were however now very severe repercussions for any LPG members suspected of deliberately hindering the successful development of collective farming. There had certainly been instances of draconian punishments meted out for acts of supposed economic sabotage against the LPG before August 1961. On a national level the death penalty was applied and publicised in two cases of arson both before and after the construction of the Wall.³ Nevertheless the more secure position of the SED leadership after August 13th 1961 immediately allowed the stricter application of ideological

² ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/241 BDVP Kripo an die HVDVP, Hauptabteilung K, Abt. U. Berlin, Brennpunktmeldung für den Monat Mai 1962 28.5.1962 p.376.

³ Werkentin, F. *Politische Strafjustiz in der Ara Ulbricht* (Berlin 1995) pp.106-109.

discrimination both within the ranks of the regime's own apparatus and among the population at large.

Communities within the 5km exclusion zone along the *Bezirk's* border with the Federal Republic were subjected to a sudden crack down on "hostile" elements. In part because of the strength of religious affiliation in the border areas of the Catholic Eichsfeld and in part because of the proximity of the West, villages in this area were suspected of being potentially dangerous hotbeds of enemy agents and sympathetic reactionaries.⁴ Individuals and families deemed politically unreliable - not least on the basis of their behaviour during the collectivisation campaign and the degree of their acceptance of the LPG - were forcefully deported in early October 1961 with little or no warning. The brutality and in a large number of cases, the arbitrary nature of these actions sent a clear signal of the ruthlessness with which the regime was willing to go about consolidating its authority in rural communities. In some cases seemingly arbitrary expulsions provoked attempts by villagers to have the decision revoked. Petitions were signed and sent to the Central Committee of the SED in Berlin – these had however very little success. Rather such evidence of unchecked negative opinion towards the regime resulted in further investigations by the Stasi and the SED Party Control Commission not only into those involved in the petition but also into those functionaries who had failed to act against it on the ground.⁵ The virulence of the SED regime's actions against sections of the population in the border areas succeeded in demonstrating the potential repercussions of any future behaviour which might be construed as hostile to the state. This no doubt limited any potential support which those who sought to flee the GDR received from locals in the border regions. No less significantly it also raised the spectre of forced resettlement as a possible punishment for 'hostile' villages elsewhere in the *Bezirk*, as one villager in *Kreis* Bad Langensalza pointed out: "with the actions on the border, it would not be long before people in Reichenbach will be expelled too."⁶

During late summer in 1961 action was taken, in the words of the Ministry for Agriculture in Berlin, to "unmask hostile and counterrevolutionary forces in the village."

⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4-59 SED Kreisleitung Heiligenstadt an die SED Bezirksleitung BPKK Einschätzung über die Feindarbeit im Kreis im 2. Quartal 1961, 30.6.1961 p.455; SED Bezirksleitung BPKK, Information über die Feindarbeit im Bezirk entsprechend den vierteljährlichen Berichten der KPKK 17.7.1961 p.400.

⁵ For example ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4-59 KPKK Nordhausen, Bericht über Feindarbeit im IV. Quartal 18.12.1961 p.79.

⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4-59 KPKK Bad Langensalza, Bericht über Feindarbeit im IV. Quartal 13.12.1961 pp.62-67.

Public confrontations were staged with numerous farmers, above all those who had been local agricultural functionaries under the Nazis (*Ortsbauernführer*), as well as other Nazi party members and *Wehrmacht* officers, resulting in a number of arrests or restrictions on their movements. The crack-down on such elements of the rural population resulted, it was claimed, in immediate improvements to the labour discipline and the work ethic of LPG members. Villagers generally had become more active in their “confrontations with hostile and un-progressive forces in the villages and LPGs”. Moreover several thousand farmers around the country who had up until then continued to farm individually had been moved to “participate actively in the collective”. For all the confidence and authority lent the regime’s apparatus by the construction of the Wall, there were still considerable limitations on the scale of the confrontation with ‘hostile forces’ which could be mounted in rural communities. Local functionaries could not always be relied upon to pursue the class conflict with the degree of zeal required. Nonetheless it is likely that the construction of the Wall itself and the exemplary punitive action which followed, targeted particularly against those who could be easily identified as having “reactionary tendencies”, had a monitory effect on the rural population – LPG members included.⁷

According to district police reports from around *Bezirk* Erfurt, even minor acts or expressions of anti-GDR and anti-LPG sentiment in villages were punished severely, especially if they were combined with other evidence of a reactionary attitude such as a Nazi past or regular watching of Western television.⁸ One farmer in Bad Sulza who had in previous months come to the attention of the police for his ‘hostile attitude’ was now given a one-year prison sentence for ripping down a GDR flag from a sports ground.⁹ In a particularly severe case, action was also taken against religious opposition to the collectives, which was hampering progress particularly in Catholic areas. A Catholic lay preacher was arrested and sentenced to as much as four years imprisonment charged with

⁷ SAPMO B-Arch, DY30/IV 2/7/376 Ministerium für Landwirtschaft, Erfassung und Forstwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Entwicklung der Lage auf dem Lande in Vorbereitung der Wahlen zum 17.9.1961 pp.65-70.

⁸ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Kreisdienststelle Weimar 379, Analyse über die Gemeinde Legefeld 11.10.1961 p.62.

⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 59 SED Kreisleitung Sondershausen an die BPKK, Einschätzung über einige Erscheinungen im Kr. Sondershausen 25.9.1961 p.344; KPKK Erfurt-Land, Bericht über Feindarbeit im III. Quartal 25.9.1961 p.222; KPKK Mühlhausen, Bericht über Feindarbeit im III. Quartal 26.9.1961 p.300.; SED Kreisleitung Apolda an die BPKK, Bericht über Feindarbeit im III. Quartal 29.9.1961 p.135.

having persuaded a number of board members in LPGs across the *Bezirk* to give up their posts.¹⁰

The potential for a criminal and ideological interpretation to be applied by the police and Justice Ministry to almost any circumstance which undermined collective farming or damaged productivity was a strong incentive for farmers to disassociate themselves from any manifestations of hostility towards the LPG. Outbreaks of disease or sudden death among livestock, damage to crop stores caused by fires and even petty vandalism or damage to LPG property tended to be classed as the result of ‘enemy activity’, and where the ‘perpetrators’ were identified, very severe punishments could be handed out. According to police reports from February 1962 one LPG member in *Kreis Mühlhausen* was sentenced to four and a half years hard labour for mistreating and neglecting the cows in his charge, thereby contributing to livestock losses.¹¹ In *Heringen*, *Kreis Nordhausen*, the LPG chairman and two members of the board were arrested for “consistently hostile activities”. Alleged to have once been active Nazis, they were held responsible for ‘consciously’ causing a high livestock mortality rate in the LPG and thereby bringing about the failure of the LPG to fulfil its market production quota. In one case an LPG member was sentenced to fourteen months imprisonment for not declaring the full number of potatoes which were in his possession, farming other villagers’ small plots of land for them and for declaring that he had been forced into the LPG.¹² That the new climate had an impact on collective farmers themselves can be seen in the attitude expressed by the district shepherd in *Kreis Weimar* when faced with a severe shortage of feed for the animals in his charge. In a report by a Stasi informant on an assembly in the LPG Type III *Legefeld* held in January 1962, the shepherd was heard to comment that: “he knew from experience the police would hold him responsible and he wasn’t going to let himself be locked up for this!”¹³

With the construction of the Wall came new legislation enabling serious punitive action to be taken against farmers who refused to work in the collective. Classified as

¹⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 59 SED Kreisleitung Worbis an die BPKK, Quartalsbericht über Feindarbeit im 3. Quartal 29.9.1961 p.379.

¹¹ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 VPKA Mühlhausen, Abt. K an den Leiter des VPKA, Einschätzung der Lage in der Landwirtschaft im Kreisgebiet. 5.2.1962 p.154.

¹² ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 59 SED Kreisleitung Nordhausen an die BPKK, Einschätzung über den Umfang und die Wirkung der Feindarbeit im Kreisgebiet Nordhausen im III. Quartal 1961 28.9.1961 p.310; KPKK Arnstadt, Bericht über Feindarbeit im IV.Quartal 21.12.1961 p.2; SED Kreisleitung Apolda an die BPKK, Bericht über Feindarbeit im IV. Quartal 20.12.1961 p.10.

¹³ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Kreisdienststelle Weimar 379, GI “Max” Bericht über die Jahresendversammlung der LPG *Legefeld*, Abschrift 2.2.1962 p.33.

“work-shy” and truants, they could be sentenced to serve in a labour-education camp if they chose to resist the “will of the majority” and refused to work for the LPG. The number of farmers actually punished on this charge is not clear, nevertheless police sources in *Bezirk* Erfurt do refer to a few, seemingly exemplary arrests where LPG members were known consistently to refuse to work for the collective farm. For example a farmer in Hohenfelden, *Kreis* Weimar-Land was reported to have been put under arrest for truancy. He had failed to do more than a few days work in the LPG since the previous year and had encouraged other members to do likewise.¹⁴ Action also began to be taken against those LPG members who were thought to maintain an excessive household plot or private livestock and thereby earn an income without participating fully in the LPG. A report by the District SED Party Control Commissions (*Kreisparteikontrollkommission* or KPKK) in *Kreis* Arnstadt and in *Kreis* Langensalza in December 1961 discovered one farmer in the LPG Type III Arnstadt who was allegedly earning over 15,000 Marks a year for produce from his private plot and livestock, while farming 1.4 hectares rather than the 0.5 hectares officially allowed him.¹⁵ Police also investigated an LPG Type III in *Kreis* Sondershausen where it was revealed that a large proportion of the members gained incomes from private production which were significantly higher than their incomes from the collective. Of the sixty-three members, only thirty ever appeared for work in the LPG on a regular basis, while twenty-nine of the men had completed less than one hundred work units in the year.¹⁶

That such situations should have arisen is demonstrative of the limits to which functionaries of the LPG or indeed the local state authority had been able or willing to curtail abuses of the statute up to this point. The construction of the Wall and the escalation thereafter of punitive action against those who appeared to be undermining collective farming began to create a new climate in which the limits to dissent were clearly marked. With this background LPG functionaries stated clearly the connection between the limited success of the LPG and the behaviour or attitude of recalcitrant members who preferred to work on their private land and contributed little time to the LPG. The *Rat des*

¹⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 59 KPKK Erfurt-Land, Bericht über Feindarbeit im III. Quartal 25.9.1961 p.222; SED Kreisleitung Weimar-Land an die BPKK, Informativbericht über Feindarbeit im Kreis Weimar-Land im Zusammenhang mit den Sicherheitsmassnahmen vom 13.8.1961, 9.9.1961 p.360.

¹⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 59 KPKK Arnstadt, Bericht über die Feindarbeit im IV. Quartal 21.12.1961 p.2; KPKK Bad Langensalza, Bericht über die Feindarbeit im IV. Quartal 13.12.1961 p.62.

¹⁶ ThHStAW RdB L52 - BDVP Operativstab, Information 6/62 Landwirtschaft 9.1.1962.

*Bezirk*es reported approvingly for example of an LPG in *Kreis* Arnstadt where farmers who had completed few work units were addressed by name and house number during the main annual members' assembly in 1962, shaming them with the censure of their neighbours.¹⁷ Similarly local committees of the National Front also sought wherever possible to publicise the efforts or lack of them of individual members of the collectives. Agitation groups addressing farmers in 1962 came thus armed with information on how much each one had contributed to the fulfilment of the plan.¹⁸

With the realisation that there was little benefit in opposing the LPG and few if any alternatives to working within it, many new and reluctant collective farmers accepted their LPG as the institution within which they would be allowed to earn a livelihood, and set about working for its profitability. One collective farmer in *Kreis* Heiligenstadt reportedly admitted that he had been among those who sought to hinder the development of the LPG. He claimed however to have changed his mind and considered it in his own and everyone else's better interests to make the LPG work.¹⁹ How far such realisations were widespread is difficult to gauge. Nevertheless instances of a general "go slow" attitude did clearly diminish as acceptance of the LPG increased during 1962. Many more LPG members thus began to work effectively as collective farmers, within the framework laid out in the LPG statutes. The fact that members' assemblies were held in LPGs throughout the *Bezirk* at the start of 1962 with a higher than ever average attendance level at 80% appeared to signal the seriousness with which collective farmers took the LPG, at least as an institution.²⁰

There is no doubt that the building of the wall and the subsequent crack down diminished the level of overt hostility towards collective farming, particularly among those farmers who objected to the LPG on principle. It was certainly an important step too towards raising the level of acceptance of the LPG as the essential framework in which the land was farmed. However while there remained little evidence of the benefits of collectivised agriculture, rural communities continued to be marked too by outbursts of

¹⁷ ThHStAW RdB L1153 Abt. Landwirtschaft Informatorischer Bericht über den Stand der Jahresendabrechnung in den LPG am 29.1.62, 1.2.1962.

¹⁸ ThHStAW NF 126 Bezirkssekretariat, Referat zu der Entwicklung der Nationalen Front (undated) p.61.

¹⁹ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information: Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 18/62 9.2.1962 p.72.

²⁰ ThHStAW RdB L1153 Abt. Landwirtschaft Informatorischer Bericht über den Stand der Jahresendabrechnung in den LPG am 29.1.62, 1.2.1962.

popular dissatisfaction not least because fear of financial destitution remained very real for some collective farmers.

Sources of Continued Instability

The pay and conditions for large numbers of LPG members, particularly those in LPG Type IIIs, appeared to have little prospect of improving in 1962, resulting in demonstrations of discontent at the start of the new year. For 1960, the state guaranteed an annual income of 3,120 Marks for each LPG member working full time, which corresponded approximately to a work unit value of 6 Marks.²¹ This amount was considerably lower however than most considered reasonable compensation for the difficulty of the work they put in and the restrictions preventing them seeking better paid work elsewhere. A member of the LPG Type III “Fortschritt” in Kindelbrück made this clear to representatives of the *Rat des Kreises* Sömmerda in May 1960, shouting out at the members’ assembly: “you jobs, food-stuffed officials, you’re alright for money. We’re not going to be kept quiet with promises. We want the work unit to be paid at 7 Marks”.²² At the end of 1960 there were at least 126 LPG Type III in the *Bezirk* which were officially deemed loss-making. Although this was considered a marked improvement on the previous year, the value of the work unit in most LPG Type III remained barely more than the minimum. In the upland districts the situation was particularly dire; 63% of LPG Type III in *Kreis* Mühlhausen and 54% in *Kreis* Heiligenstadt continued to be financially unviable.²³ This already difficult situation was compounded further in 1961 when heavy rainfall in the *Bezirk* in May and June promised to do serious damage to the first fully collective harvest.²⁴ By the end of the harvest in 1961 – thanks to a combination of bad weather and the disruption resulting from collectivisation and the flight of farmers to the West - the gross production of crops in *Bezirk* Erfurt had reached only 71% of the 1958

²¹ This work unit value takes into account the amount deducted for payment in kind over the course of the year. To qualify for subsidies to ensure the income of members did not sink below 3,120 Marks LPG were required to keep to limits on the amount accumulated as capital and the number of work units performed by the members. ThHStAW L562 Rat des Kreises Worbis, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Analyse der Entwicklung der LPG hinsichtlich der Erfüllung der Produktions- und Finanzpläne im Jahre 1960 20.2.1961.

²² ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab, Information über Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 24/60 20.5.1960.

²³ ThHStAW RdB L562 Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht über die politische und ökonomische Entwicklung der LPG des Bezirkes im Jahre 1960. 27.2.1961.

²⁴ Gabler, D. *Entwicklungsabschnitte der Landwirtschaft in der DDR* (Berlin 1995) p.118: in 6 Kreise 80% of fields suffered some damage; ThHStAW RdB L591 Abt. Landwirtschaft Einschätzung des Standes der Entwicklung der LPG, besonders der LPG Typ I und II im Bezirk. 1.7.1961; ThHStAW RdB L1153 Abt. Landwirtschaft Begründung zur Erhöhung der Überbrückungskredite re Ratsbeschluss Nr 186-104/61 Undated (Nov. 1961); SED BPA, BIV/2/4-59 SED Kreisleitung Eisenach an die BPKK, Bericht über die Feindtätigkeit im Kreis Eisenach 30.6.1961 p.429.

level²⁵ prompting comments such as the parodying slogan “Mit Regen und Gott geht die LPG Bankrott.” (“With the help of God and rain, the LPG goes down the drain”).²⁶ From all appearances the rush for full collectivisation had failed to bring about the dramatic rise in production which had been a prime motive for its introduction.

The poor harvest exacerbated the difficulties faced by LPG chairmen in mediating the demands of the state, while maintaining some degree of harmony among their members. It is unsurprising that some LPG chairmen threatened to resign, if the production plan targets set for their LPG were not lowered. Not only would failure to exceed plan targets reduce the price paid for produce by the state, it would also mean the LPG members received a smaller portion of the produce for their own use.²⁷ In September 1961 in *Bezirk* Erfurt, all collective farmers were required to allow inspection of their private stores of potatoes and allow a portion of them to be bought by the state to ensure the requirements of the population as a whole were well covered.²⁸ The actual extraction of produce from LPG members’ stores appeared to some collective farmers as an incontrovertible demonstration of their second-class status in the GDR and gave grounds for hostility towards local state functionaries required to oversee this process. In the village of Mellingen, *Kreis* Weimar, it was rumoured for example that the mayor and the ABV were receiving a bonus for every sack of potatoes they could collect from farmers. The complaints of LPG members were clearly borne out of frustration with the lack of options available to them to resist (what they considered) unfair treatment. According to a report by an informant for the Stasi in Mellingen, some LPG members had indeed attempted to conceal some of their potatoes. On being discovered, one was reported to exclaim: “Why don’t you just take the whole lot and give me a train ticket to Bonn”.²⁹ This way out was of course now barred. Those who felt aggrieved by the state’s treatment of them had little choice other than to make their protests within the bounds of their current situation.

²⁵ Gabler p.118.

²⁶ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/139 Stab/Operativstab, Information 56/61 23.8.1961.

²⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 59 SED Kreisleitung Gotha an die BPKK, Feindtätigkeit im Kr. Gotha im 3. Quartal 1961 29.9.1961 p.275.

²⁸ B-Arch Abt. DDR DE 1/29131 Zentrale Kommission für Staatliche Kontrolle – Der Vorsitzende, Informationsbericht Nr.36 10.11.1961; Beschluss des Politbüros über operative Massnahmen zur Sicherung der Versorgung mit einigen Nahrungsgütern und Futtermitteln 13.3.1961.

²⁹ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, Kreisdienststelle Weimar 772, GI “Buchmann”, Lageeinschätzung der Gemeinde Mellingen übergeben am 10.11.1961, 14.11.1961 pp.91-94.

At the end of 1961 LPG accountants assessed the impact of the year's harvest on the financial status of the LPG. The state of affairs in LPG Type III was dire. In *Kreis Mühlhausen* alone LPG Type III had to be subsidised by 1,400,000 Marks to bring members' incomes up to the minimum level which itself was considered a famine wage.³⁰ In the *Bezirk* as a whole 50% of LPG Type III had required subsidies in order to be able to pay their members the minimum value of the work unit. When the value of the work unit was publicly announced in each of the LPG assemblies at the start of the new year, there was unsurprisingly considerable disgruntlement. In *Kreis Bad Langensalza* members of a number of LPG complained openly about the money which they were to receive, while elsewhere in the district slogans were graffitied in LPG such as: "we work cheaper than coolies"; "SOS we want money" and "Work slow".³¹ The ones most directly affected by the LPG's low profits were those machine operators and former industrial workers who did not supplement their income from the LPG with their own livestock or household plot and relied exclusively on being paid in monthly advance instalments for their work over the year. Faced by the failure of the LPG to provide a sufficient income and discussion of a possible state directive to LPG chairmen to limit the amount paid out in monthly advance wage instalments, a number of LPG Type III members sought to show their dissatisfaction.³² Professional tractor drivers – who had been moved to join the LPG from the MTS with the transfer of machinery – and former industrial workers, many of them SED members, held work stoppages and sought officially to withdraw their membership of the LPG in protest.³³ Between 12th December 1961 and 15th January 1962, the *Bezirk* police authority recorded at least 162 withdrawal declarations.³⁴ In February 1962 at least 101 attempted withdrawals were registered from LPGs in the *Bezirk*.³⁵

Where in previous years withdrawal had represented an act of resistance to the end of private farming and was a reaction against surrendering land into the collective, in 1962 it represented more a matter of protest at the poverty of working for the LPG – primarily by those who had not contributed land in the first place. A report from the *Rat des*

³⁰ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 21/62, Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 15.02.1962 p.80.

³¹ ThHStAW RdB L52 BDVP Operativstab, Information 11/62 Landwirtschaft 26.1.1962.

³² B-Arch, Abt. DDR, DK1 928 Ministerium für Landwirtschaft, Erfassung und Forstwirtschaft, Protokoll über die Auswertung der bisherigen Durchsetzung des Beschlusses vom 18.1.1962 mit den Verantwortlichen für die Bezirke 21.2.1962 pp.218-226.

³³ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-43 Abt. Org./Kader, Einschätzung der MV in den PO der Landwirtschaft zur Auswertung des Briefes des 1. Bezirkssekretärs der Bezirksleitung 4.1.1962 pp.1-6.

³⁴ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/353 Operativstab, Zur Situation in der Landwirtschaft 20.1.1962 p.18.

³⁵ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 29/62, Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 9.3.1962 p.91.

Bezirk in November 1962 notes the tendency of members of weak LPG in *Kreis* Mühlhausen and Nordhausen to threaten withdrawal during discussions over rates of payment.³⁶ Similarly in an LPG Type III in *Kreis* Heiligenstadt, a large proportion of the members threatened withdrawal unless they continued to receive the state subsidies required to increase the income level.³⁷ Withdrawal or the threat to do so was more a means of drawing attention to perceived injustices within the LPG and gaining the required investment to raise wages than a serious attempt to oppose the continuation of collective farming.³⁸

The *Bezirk* Police Authority's political department reporting on the role of the ABV in that year stressed that 1962 was the year of transition in agriculture where 1963 would be the year of "normality".³⁹ Certainly there were still numerous instances in the *Bezirk* at the start of 1962 where police investigations were deemed necessary as collective farmers not only protested but appeared also to be attempting to subvert or manipulate the structures of the LPG. The Ministry for State Security began an investigation in early 1962 into the LPG Type III in Trügleben, *Kreis* Gotha, after only three LPG members were found to have attended the annual members' assembly.⁴⁰ Elsewhere secret ballots for the election of the board which resulted in fewer SED members being chosen than before prompted police investigations, as did odd cases where the members' assemblies were held secretly in the private home of the chairman, deliberately to prevent local state or party functionaries from attending.⁴¹ In *Kreis* Nordhausen district state functionaries attending an LPG assembly found themselves having to talk down "negative elements" who were strongly opposed to SED agricultural policy. More seriously in the LPG Type I Niederrimmern in *Kreis* Weimar, plans to vote out the chairman – the only SED member in the collective farm – and replace him with someone else had to be stopped by the intervention of the SED *Kreisleitung* and the *Rat des Kreises*.⁴²

³⁶ ThHStAW RdB L1153 Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht über die Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Jahresendabrechnung der LPG, besonders in den Nomenklatur-LPG, wirtschaftsschwachen LPG sowie LPG in den Grenz und Höhengemeinden. 5.11.62.

³⁷ ThHStAW RdB L52 BDVP Operativstab, Information 61/62 27.7.1962.

³⁸ ThHStAW RdB L52 BDVP Operativstab, Information 4/62: Einige Hinweise zur Beurteilung der Lage in der Landwirtschaft 5.1.1962.

³⁹ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/083 Politabteilung, Protokoll ueber die Arbeitsberatung der Politabteilung 9.7.1962 p.15.

⁴⁰ ThHStAW RdB L1153 Abt. Landwirtschaft Informatorischer Bericht über den Stand der Jahresendabrechnung in den LPG am 29.1.1962, 31.2.1962.

⁴¹ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 18/62, Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft p.75.

⁴² ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 21/62, Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 15.02.1962 p.80.

Throughout the spring, troubleshooting brigades continued to operate around the *Bezirk* and agitators were deployed on certain festival days to encourage farmers to adhere to the state demands for increased planting of certain unpopular crops or to develop collective practices further. At the end of February in *Kreis* Nordhausen alone in one day as many as 1,200 agitators were at work.⁴³ At the same time, a tense atmosphere clearly continued to exist in many rural communities. In March 1962 suggestions seemed to be made during the VII. German Farmers' Congress that the boards and functionaries of LPGs Types I and II might be given access to the private bank accounts of their members in order to enable the purchase of machinery from the state. This sparked rumours of obligatory contributions to the funds of the LPGs being removed from farmers' bank accounts, with police reporting a panic rush by farmers to withdraw money from banks throughout April 1962 in *Kreise* Weimar, Worbis and Sondershausen.⁴⁴ If nothing else, there remained an atmosphere of considerable mistrust in LPGs as to what new means the SED state might employ to reduce farmers' control of their own resources or at least short change them for the use of their labour.

Two years on from the completion of the collectivisation campaign and a year on from the construction of the Berlin Wall, the situation in the various LPG in *Bezirk* Erfurt continued to be highly variable. There had been a general reduction in outright opposition to or even subversion of collective farming and indeed an increase in the acceptance of the collective farm as an institution with a long-term future. Acceptance of the LPG as the only means through which it would be possible to secure a livelihood and a willingness to work for the prosperity of the farm were not however necessarily reflected in an harmonious relationship with the regime's apparatus for running agriculture. There remained a considerable degree of mistrust among farmers that the state was in the process of finding new ways to underpay (largely LPG Type IIIs) or expropriate them further (largely LPG Type Is). At the same time, the huge pressure for collectivised farming to prove itself and for the 1962 harvest to be successful, after the difficulties of the previous years, coupled with the uncompromising confidence of sections of the regime apparatus since the building of the Wall made for continued confrontations.

⁴³ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Operativstab, Information 23/62, Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 22.2.1962 p.86.

⁴⁴ ThHStAW RdB L52, BDVP Stab/Operativstab Information 35/62, 5.4.62; 36/62 13.4.62; 39/62 28.4.1962.

Confrontation and Control

The collectivisation campaign itself had been characterised from the regime's perspective as an assertion of the science of socialist necessity over the conservative selfishness of farmers. However a potent basis of opposition to the collectivisation in practice, if not in principle, was the demonstrable proof that it damaged production. The organisational turmoil of 1960 and 1961 left a large number of fields uncultivated and while this was clearly the result of the manner of the collectivisation and not the notion of collectivised agriculture in itself, the resulting low production figures were grist to the mill of those who had opposed the process in the first place. As farmers in *Kreis Nordhausen* pointed out: "with so many fields uncultivated, things cannot go on like this".⁴⁵ In those LPGs where farmers had been compelled, in the interests of larger plantations of crops, to fill dividing ditches and remove hedging between fields, opposition to the LPG found still further vindication. Farmers blamed the collective farming system for exacerbating the effects of the bad weather in 1961. Heavy rains had caused widespread damage to fields and because the intervening ditches had been removed between the various plots, it was argued, the water could not drain preventing any attempts to re-cultivate the soil.⁴⁶

Even as the LPGs became more stable, there was still a clear gulf on numerous farming issues between socialist agricultural policy and farmers' own sense of good practice. The methods already initiated during the 1950s to improve the levels of livestock in the LPGs rapidly and raise the overall productivity of the GDR in meat and dairy products above that of the FRG – namely the extensive cultivation of low-maintenance maize as a feed crop and the construction of large yet inexpensive open sheds (*Offenställe*) for more concentrated livestock holdings – had had only limited success. In the opinion of many farmers they also clearly contradicted received wisdom and good practice. The construction of *Offenställe* had too often been seen to have disastrous consequences for livestock. Use of shoddy materials and poor choices of location exposed the animals kept in them to poor conditions.⁴⁷ In extreme weather, such conditions in these sheds too easily became fatal. Investment was thus wasted on livestock and on buildings which ultimately

⁴⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 59 SED Kreisleitung Nordhausen an die BPKK, Einschätzung über den Umfang und die Wirkung der Feindarbeit im Kreisgebiet Nordhausen im III. Quartal 1961 p.310.

⁴⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 59 SED Kreisleitung Eisenach an die BPKK, Bericht über die Feindtätigkeit im Kreis 30.6.1961 p.429; SED Kreisleitung Gotha an die BPKK, Feindarbeit im Kreis Gotha 23.6.1961 p.449.

⁴⁷ ThHStAW RdB L562 RdK Worbis – Abt. Finanzen: Landwirtschaft. Analyse der Entwicklung der LPG hinsichtlich der Erfüllung der Produktions- und Finanzpläne im Jahre 1960, 20.2.1961.

were of little value.⁴⁸ Discussions among voluntary auxiliary policemen from across the *Bezirk* at a conference in April 1961 highlighted *Offenställe* as a particular cause of irritation in the LPGs. The report of this meeting shows too however the resistance of the *Bezirk* functionaries present to recognising this problem. Despite the insistence of these voices from below, the discussion was closed with the remark: “*Offenställe* will continue to be built and we will learn from the experiences we collect”.⁴⁹

The use of maize as a feed crop was also not well received. The cultivation of maize had been adopted by the Soviet Union, mimicking the USA, as a safe means of producing reasonably high quality feed in large quantities, which could be cheaply and easily harvested with machinery if planted over large enough expanses. Thus in turn farmers in the GDR were initially encouraged to ‘learn from the Soviet friends’ and later then directed to devote a certain proportion of land to cultivating maize. In meeting these directives, LPG functionaries found themselves required to go against their own knowledge of the suitability of the land for this purpose. Even though the effectiveness of the maize crop was compromised by insufficient silage capacity in most LPG, arguments that traditional feed crops, while requiring more attention, would produce better quality feed were ignored. As a result the number of animals sustainable was overestimated and led naturally to shortages of quality feed.⁵⁰ Although maize came gradually to be recognised by farmers as an essential part of the diet of livestock, at the start of 1962 in some LPG Type I the size of maize plantations was still being hotly debated. The *Rat des Bezirkes* insisted that a minimum of 12% of the arable land of the LPG be used for cultivating maize to ensure feed stocks were sufficient to prevent a repeat of the shortages arising from the previous year. LPG members continued to refuse to use this much land for maize production arguing that they themselves had enough pasture land to ensure their own livestock were well fed come what may.⁵¹

⁴⁸ ThHStAW BDVP 20/065 Stab/Operativstab Information 54/60 Vorkommnisse in der Landwirtschaft 22.9.1960; Erwin Strittmatter’s novel “*Ole Bienkopp*” vividly depicts some of the problems associated with the *Offenställe* and the frustration of LPG farmers upon whom they were imposed. Strittmatter, E. *Ole Bienkopp*, (Berlin 1971) e.g pp.260-262.

⁴⁹ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/225 BDVP Abt Schutzpolizei, Protokoll von der Bezirkshelferaktiv-Tagung am 24.4.1961, 26.4.1961 p.75.

⁵⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-335 SED Bezirksleitung Sekretariat Beschluss-Protokoll Nr. 22/60 der Sekretariatssitzung Bericht über der Arbeitsgruppe zur Untersuchung der Ursachen des derzeitigen Standes der Produktivität der Milchkühe (im Kreis Weimar) 4.7.1960 p.1; Gruhle p.89; ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4 – 58 SED Kreisleitung Eisenach an die BPKK, Bericht über die Feindtätigkeit 18.4.1961.p.199.

⁵¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3/414 Bezirkssekretariat der Nationalen Front, Informationsbericht V/62: Stand der Vorbereitung des VII. Deutschen Bauernkongresses 17.2.1962 pp.14-24.

The greater self-confidence of the regime a year after the construction of the Wall and two years after the completion of the collectivisation campaign was reflected in the treatment of collective farmers during the harvest in 1962. During the heightened pressure of the harvest period, district state and party functionaries sought more than ever to assert their authority over collective farmers. The crucial point of contention remained in how in particular this harvest was to be conducted – with mistrust apparent as to the effectiveness of the methods and the true motives of farmers and functionaries alike. The arguments were finely balanced. On the one hand the state administration claimed to be able to maximise the cost-efficiency and productivity of the harvesting, collection, storage and distribution of crops if the whole process was run according to a strict timetable on a sufficiently large scale. This claim however did not always ring true, seeming to be at times a thin veil for the exertion of authority by the administration, at the expense of the interests of LPG members. As one field brigade leader asked a delegate from the *Rat des Kreises* in *Kreis Apolda*: “What sort of bonus are you getting for putting us under all this pressure?”⁵² Farmers reasonably claimed to know best when their crops ought to be harvested, how long it would take them and what was possible with the machinery available in practice, especially when faced with state or party officials who had little or no agricultural training. As the accountant in one LPG in *Kreis Apolda* put it: “the comrade functionaries should let the farmers get on with their work and not set down regulations....”⁵³ Nevertheless the superiority of modern machinery and equipment for drying, storing and distributing crops in theory refuted the need to follow the traditional, local rules on what and when to plant and harvest and what the weather would be. Farmers’ objections to the interference of the regime’s representatives could thus at times be disregarded as part of an unhealthy regard for tradition and an unfounded suspicion of modern methods, as well as a simple hostility towards the SED state.

Confrontations occurred in a number of LPG particularly where district and MTS functionaries insisted upon measures to speed up the harvest. In *Kreis Apolda* a brigadier was abused and threatened with the Stasi by the director of the MTS for refusing to allow grain to be harvested just after it had rained. Although the brigadier was motivated by a

⁵² ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-557 Bericht der AG die in Arnstadt zur Ernte eingesetzt ist. 10.9.1962 p.25.

⁵³ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/364 VPKA Apolda, Aufklärung und Meldewesen an die BDVP, Informationsbericht über die Lage in der Landwirtschaft 03.10.1962 p.124.

desire to maximise the yield and prevent it from rotting in storage, the MTS director regarded the delay as an unnecessary – and costly – interruption to the progress of the harvest machines under his command.⁵⁴ Still more common were disputes over the state's deployment of outsiders (students, school children and factory workers from the towns) in the LPG to 'help' with the harvest. LPG members opposed such measures, claiming that such helpers were not only unnecessary, they would not do the job well and that they would undercut farmers' incomes. In one LPG in *Kreis* Gotha, it was reported that two women farmers opposed the arrival of the harvest helpers from the town suggesting, presumably with reference to by-gone years that the workers "had only come because they were hungry". As a result of such antipathy some LPG functionaries sent the helpers away pointing out too that they would not be able to offload all of their crop if they harvested too quickly.⁵⁵ Despite the various instances of LPGs rejecting help, the *Bezirksleitung* registered a total of 50,000 harvest helpers deployed during the harvest in the *Bezirk*, recruited both locally and in the towns and factories of the region. There was a documented tendency of the district authorities to overestimate these figures. Nevertheless they appear to have been successful at imposing helpers on LPGs in large numbers.⁵⁶

District functionaries' moves to speed up the harvest against the better judgement of LPG chairmen and collective farmers provoked in places considerable irritation. A police report in late September noted "widespread discussion among farmers that the pace of the harvest is too quick and that instructions are being given by functionaries of the *Rat des Kreises* which are causing damage to the LPG." The chairmen of an LPG in Schwobfeld, *Kreis* Heiligenstadt was quoted bitterly pointing out that "LPG members would have to keep their mouths shut and the gentlemen from the *Rat des Kreises* decide when the grain is to be brought in."⁵⁷ Board members in the LPG Aschara *Kreis* Weimar complained that "everything was being dictated from above", while the chairman of the LPG Wolfsbehringen complained that the SED "had no need to concern itself with everything".⁵⁸

⁵⁴ ThHStAW RdB L1086 Brief an den Vorsitzenden des RdB 19.9.1962: Beschwerde über die Arbeit mit den Menschen durch den Direktor der MTS Apolda-Heusdorf.

⁵⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./ Kader, Informationsbericht zur Erntesituation in den Kreisen 5.9.1962 pp.154-158.

⁵⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./ Kader, Situationsbericht Getreideernte 9.9.1962 pp.172-174.

⁵⁷ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/352 Aufklärung und Meldewesen, Information 66/62 p.158.

⁵⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./Kader, Informationsbericht Nr. 29/62 undated. pp.281-291.

Such matters concerned not only LPG members and LPG functionaries but also at times, local functionaries of party and state who could see only the negative impact of bureaucratic interference where it took precedence over local and practical understanding of the situation. A report from September 1962 noted that leading local SED members and village mayors openly spoke out against SED policies and in some cases sought to resign their positions in protest. The mayor of Gamstädt was reported to have argued that it was no good setting campaign targets but rather it should be left up to the farmers to set their deadlines. Even a leading member of the SED *Kreisleitung* Mühlhausen, concerned by the situation in his home village, argued against any action which might jeopardise the quality of the harvest for the sake of saving time.⁵⁹ The mayor of Herbsleben, *Kreis* Bad Langensalza asked to resign saying the measures of the party were “stuff and nonsense” (“*Käse und Quatsch*”). Other leading village functionaries, among them SED members, were openly hostile to outside interference. In nearby Henningsleben, a leading member of the SED party organisation was reported saying during a meeting: “we should be out working not holding discussions. Next year we should plant five hectares of clubs and with them thrash all the functionaries who come out here.”⁶⁰ Such comments were indicative of the extent of local irritation at the interference of the district authorities and the unnecessary dictates of the SED leadership. They were made too with some justification. At the beginning of 1963 an assessment was made of the numbers of LPGs still struggling in the *Bezirk* and those which had improved sufficiently to be classed as financially stable. Of the 175 LPGs counted in 1962 as “left behind”, 84 had improved. However a further 20 LPGs had sunk into financial difficulty during the year leaving the net total of struggling LPGs in the *Bezirk* at 111, approximately 1 in 10.⁶¹ Moreover with the results of the harvest only marginally better than in previous years, collective farmers continued to show their dissatisfaction with the LPG by seeking to withdraw from it.⁶²

⁵⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./ Kader, 5. Informationsbericht über die Erntesituation in den Kreisen 7.9.1962 pp.163-167.

⁶⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Abt. Org./Kader, Informationsbericht Nr.29/62 undated pp.281-291.

⁶¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-051 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Abt. Org./Kader, Information an das Sekretariat, 1.Anlage 7.2.1963 p.155.

⁶² In Kreis Gotha a total of 65 withdrawal notices were recorded in 15 LPGs: ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-10 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./ Kader, Information über die Tätigkeit der Arbeitsgruppe der Bezirksleitung auf der Grundlage des Sekretariatsbeschluss vom 12.11.1962 im Kreis Gotha 17.12.1962 pp.401-406.

Conclusion

With the removal of lingering doubt over the future existence of the GDR, a degree of coherence had been lent to previously fragmented collective farms. Moreover farmers had been made well aware of the limits of dissent. However there had been no consistent and comprehensive stabilisation of the LPG, either financially or politically, while the bullying tactics of the 1962 harvest had shown themselves only of limited value and were in some cases literally counter-productive. Despite the security gained by the SED regime through the construction of the Wall, farmers in both LPG Type Is and LPG Type IIIs remained thus hostile to further state intervention in agriculture. Collectivisation in the vast majority of LPGs was by the end of 1962 far more than just collectivisation on paper. However the SED leadership's prospects of gaining consistent and comprehensive control over the conduct and development of agricultural production at the grassroots were severely limited, not least by the deficit of ideological support for socialism and the lack of confidence in socialist agricultural policy among collective farmers and LPG functionaries alike.

The next section deals with the conflicts, compromises and consensus of interests which developed between collective farmers and the functionaries of the LPG and the party and state administration in *Bezirk* Erfurt during the 1960s. It will show how attempts to reform the financial and agricultural organisation of collectivised farming were shaped by the changing circumstances in which SED policy was communicated and received in the LPG. In the next chapter, I shall look back in particular to the beginnings of a drive to increase the proportion of farmers who had received technical training since the late 1950s and the attempts to extend the network of SED party organisations into the LPGs both before and after the construction of the Wall as part of the gradual transformation of the context in which SED agricultural policy was implemented on the ground in the farms of *Bezirk* Erfurt.

SECTION 2

Communicating Reform: The Limitations of Economic Transformation

CHAPTER 4

Steps toward Reform

“We still have time and anyway we’re not ripe for becoming candidates for party membership!”¹

(Comments by LPG members to SED recruiters in Bezirk Erfurt, July 1963)

During the 1960s, the impact of the hasty completion of the collectivisation campaign on the consistency with which SED agricultural policies were communicated to the LPGs and implemented on the ground continued to be felt. In 1960 the agricultural workforce in *Bezirk* Erfurt as in the rest of the GDR was marked by a lack of technical qualifications and only very low levels of participation in political parties or indeed mass organisations. From the late 1950s, in conjunction with the collectivisation campaign, the pace of recruitment of farmers by the SED as well as the block parties² had increased. At the same time the proportion of the agricultural workforce in training for a technical qualification had also increased. Nonetheless the rate at which both political recruitment and technical qualification, particularly to an advanced level, could occur by no means matched the speed with which ultimately collectivisation was completed. This defined the context in which LPGs were formed and collective farming was subsequently consolidated and developed in an era of economic reform and technological development in agriculture, as in the rest of the economy.

The use of overt force and mass agitation in rural communities had had some success in ensuring resistance to SED policies was overcome. Nevertheless in the process productivity had been severely compromised. Moreover such an approach was not practically a sustainable basis for the long-term transmission of agricultural policy in any comprehensive or effective manner. The consistency with which district state functionaries were able to see to the implementation of SED agricultural policy continued thus to be hampered by the lack of a clear body of support on the ground within the LPGs. Steps were taken to increase the size and influence of SED party organisations over the LPGs and improve the political reliability and technical and managerial abilities of LPG

¹ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7 – 500 SED Bezirksleitung, Büro für Landwirtschaft, Analyse über die Mitgliederbewegung in den ersten 7 Monaten des Jahres 1963 und die Durchführung der Mitgliederversammlungen im Monat Juli. 15.8.1963 p.87.

² In Kreis Apolda, there was a particularly large contingent of DBD and LDPD members in the LPG: ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/353 6. Bericht zur Situation in der Landwirtschaft 24.2.1962 p.43.

functionaries. The construction of the Wall undeniably played a role in encouraging LPG members to pursue their own interests in conjunction with those of the SED regime, by joining a political party or at the very least pursuing advancement in the collectivised system through participation in agricultural training. Additionally the transition of the state apparatus for agriculture to a production oriented administration in 1963 appeared to offer better scope for winning over LPG members to participation in and acceptance of agricultural reform in the pursuit of common material interests. However in the early 1960s, hostility to SED membership remained strong. Financial and agricultural reform in the LPGs continued thus to be tempered by the inadequate communication of authority between the district state and party administration and collective farmers. Without the influence of an active and capable body of SED supporters or themselves lacking in a political or technical appreciation for SED agricultural policy, LPG chairmen often lacked either the ability or the desire to implement change in the collective farm especially where it appeared to be against their own interests or indeed the will of the majority of their constituent collective farmers.

Changing the Context for Communication of Authority

Both technical education within the parameters of socialist agricultural policy and the expansion of the regime's political network at the grassroots were essential to reconciling farmers with active participation in and development of collective farming. By re-defining the terms in which the transmission of authority occurred between the SED regime and farmers, political recruitment and technical qualification were necessary elements in the long term of a process of establishing a new stable context in which SED policies could be comprehensively and effectively implemented. A feature of the early 1960s in particular was thus the concurrent growth of adult qualification levels in agriculture on the one hand and, on the other, the expansion of the network of SED party organisations with specific responsibility for the LPGs.

The strength of support for the SED in the countryside was limited in the 1950s by a range of factors. The desire of rural communities for a return to peace following the upheavals of the Second World War, the Soviet occupation and the subsequent denazification and land reforms hindered the SED's attempts to find a foothold of support

among them. In the face of radical communist policies, the farmer proclaimed himself apolitical and focused on his land and livestock. In its turn the largely urban SED hierarchy was suspicious and resentful of the rural population: villages were religious, conservative and bound by local tradition and long-established social networks which made them impenetrable to an outsider. Some progress had without doubt been made by the second drive for collectivisation, beginning in 1958, in aligning the interests of certain groups of farmers more closely with those of the regime. However often this alignment was achieved by proxy through the VdGB – the farmers’ mutual aid union - and the DBD – the farmers’ party established under the auspices of the SED - whose independence at the grass roots made them at best unreliable outposts of loyalty to the party line. The SED itself struggled in the eyes of most rural communities to be taken seriously as an advocate of farmers’ interests, being seen as the party of the urban proletariat more than anything else. Hence, where it did recruit members, this tended to be among those who stood outside the traditional farming circles – the school teacher, the pub landlord, craftsmen, industrial workers who commuted from the villages to the factories as well as the mechanics and drivers who worked in the Machine and Tractor Stations and those workers who had been persuaded to move to the countryside who were organised in either the pioneering – and heavily subsidised - LPG Type III or the state-owned farms (*Volkseigene Güter* or VEG).

From the late 1950s onwards important initial steps were taken in recruiting LPG members to the SED and establishing party organisations dedicated to organising and influencing collective farmers. The two exceptional years (1958-60) of exponentially increasing pressure on farmers to collectivise, culminating in the critical last weeks of March 1960, drew lines of loyalty or submission, active opposition and passive resistance towards the regime within rural communities more starkly than before. While forced collectivisation without doubt provoked broad resistance and deepened hatred of the communist regime, it also persuaded some individuals to come off the fence and work together with the SED. In the course of the confrontation, people necessarily grew more accustomed to the idea of collectivisation and took seriously the prospect that once achieved it might not be reversed. Those who saw their future in agriculture undoubtedly considered how best to position themselves within the new system. As a result alongside

the resentment of the SED state, there was also some readiness to compromise with it, which grew as collective farming began to pay off and opportunities for advancement were tied up with party membership. By the same token, as the land was collectivised, more and more members of the LPG began to participate in a process of qualification, which redefined their status and prospects within collectivised farming.

Nonetheless the SED lacked a consistently reliable base of active supporters in many LPGs, particularly in the LPG Type Is, for much of the 1960s. Where there were SED members in the LPGs, they did not necessarily have sufficient influence over the running of the collective, being massively outnumbered by non-party members. In January 1961 the SED *Bezirksleitung* recorded 709 LPGs in the *Bezirk* without an SED party organisation dedicated to the collective farm (i.e. an SED *Betriebsparteiorganisation* or SED BPO).³ While party organisations existed in all but 19 villages by June 1961, only 3% of collective farmers in LPGs Types I and II and 8% of farmers in Type IIIs were members of the SED.⁴ By December 1963 there were still 503 LPGs without any SED organisation, despite concerted efforts to recruit SED members among the *Bezirk's* collective farmers. 423 of these were Type I LPGs.

Recruitment proved especially difficult in the largely Catholic northern and western border districts of Worbis and Heiligenstadt which continued to have the most LPGs without SED party organisations. There were strong disincentives for LPG members to join the SED or even take an active role in so-called LPG-*Aktivs*, committees of 'progressive' collective farmers which served as pools for potential SED recruits. The potential for social exclusion, particularly where religious loyalty was also a factor, remained in the 1960s a considerable barrier to membership. Speaking at the end of the SED *Bezirksparteiaktivtagung* in 1964, the first secretary of the SED *Bezirksleitung*, Alois Bräutigam despaired at the number of LPGs without a functioning party organisation. He recommended overcoming the reluctance of potential candidates by persuading them all to sign up in alphabetical order so that: "no one takes the blame for being the first or for being the last. As that's important in villages."⁵

³ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-362 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Abt. Org/Kader – Informationsbericht Nr.4/61 1.2.1961 p.100

⁴ Gabler, D. *Entwicklungsabschnitte der Landwirtschaft in der ehemaligen DDR* (Berlin 1995) p.125.

⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-042 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung, Büro für Landwirtschaft am 18.12.1964, Beitrag Genosse Bräutigam, 1. Bezirkssekretär p.171.

Very often objections to joining the party focused on the poor example given by existing SED members. Party membership in such small communities was as much a social as a political decision and dislike of those already in the club at a personal level made membership naturally less attractive. Certainly the low reputation of SED members in the village was given as a reason by LPG members for not wishing to join the SED, with arguments such as: “we’re not joining the party, because the comrades are no model for us”; “Put your own ranks in order first”; “teach your comrades to work like we do first.”⁶

In 1962 the KPKK was called in to investigate a particularly severe division between the SED members and other members of an LPG in a village in *Kreis* Sondershausen. The SED party organisation was attached to an LPG Type III which had been established there for the past 5 years. The LPG BPO consisted of 12 members, most of whom were LPG members. Given the standards of the time, this was ostensibly a good basis for the SED to influence the day-to-day running of the collective. Unfortunately the LPG BPO was flawed in a number of aspects. Meetings were only held when the *SED Kreisleitung* instructor arranged them, and the course of ideological instruction supposed to take place in each of the LPG BPO annually had not been held once. The party secretary, an SED member since only 1960, had left school after finishing only the 4th grade of primary school and despite having become a good farmer, had difficulty reading and writing: he was thus more or less unable to run the administrative side of party life and relied heavily on the SED *Kreisleitung* instructor responsible for this part of the world to do it for him. He was not however particularly open to instruction on the ideological issues of the day and knew very little of the party resolutions for which he was supposed to lobby in the LPG. Additionally he liked his drink and several of his fellow party members were prone to getting drunk in the pub (run incidentally by another SED member) and getting into arguments with the other collective farmers. Non-party members, which included the chairman of the LPG, objected to what the KPKK described as the party secretary’s “selfish private ambitions” (*privategoistische Bestrebungen*) and

⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-500 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Stand der Mitgliederbewegung. 12.10.1963 p.115. Some examples, from districts across the Bezirk, of the social conflicts caused in rural communities by SED membership: ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4-107 KPKK Sondershausen, Bericht über die Untersuchung in der GO der LPG West-Greussen durch die KPKK. 15.8.1962 p.22; BIV/2/4-288 KPKK Bad Langensalza, Bericht über die Untersuchungen der KPKK in der PO der LPG Hornsömmern 20.5.1963 p.155; BIV/2/4-288 KPKK Mühlhausen, Bericht über die Untersuchung der KPKK in der LPG “4. Parteitag” in Ammern 24.5.1963 p.162; BIV/2/4-299 KPKK Erfurt-Land, Bericht über die Untersuchungen in der PO/LPG III “Karl Marx” Grossfahner. 26.10.1964 p.28.

relations were marked by continual confrontation. Even in those situations where the party secretary was deemed to have been correct to address deficiencies in the running of the LPG, his actions “usually took on a hurtful guise so that his criticism gave cause for conflicts from which he drew the wrong conclusions and found himself in opposition to the LPG’s economic functionaries.” To make matters worse the members of the LPG BPO were all originally factory workers who had themselves brought no land into the collective – a circumstance which gave rise necessarily to conflicts of interest with the established farmers within the LPG.⁷

Even where a party organisation was formed in an LPG in the 1960s, there was no guarantee that its members would be active advocates of SED policies or even take part in the life of the party. In early 1964, an investigation in *Kreis Sömmerda* found that the agricultural department in the SED *Kreisleitung* was not particularly efficient in making sure that LPG party organisations were functioning properly.⁸ In the *Bezirk* as a whole in late 1964 attempts were made to improve the effect of the party organisations on collective farms. Working groups were sent into problem areas by the *Kreisleitungen* and party activists delegated into LPG party organisations. Severe problems in the LPG BPO in the *Kreise* Apolda and Erfurt-Land were found to be the result of the small proportion of actual LPG members in the party organisations.⁹ The help which party secretaries ought to have been receiving from the *Kreisleitung* was also found to have been limited owing to a lack of personnel. Instructors found that they were rarely able to do more than give basic administrative help. Instructors for the SED *Kreisleitung* Sömmerda complained of having to manage the party organisations of up to 12 villages and consequently could achieve little in any one of them.¹⁰ Party secretaries often tended to do the work of the party on their own with little or no help from other members of the party, with the consequence that in the absence of the party secretary the party organisation ceased to be effective.¹¹ Certainly the apathy of a large proportion of SED members in LPG BPO undermined their effectiveness. Party secretaries were encouraged to name and shame non-attendees, and

⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/4-107 KPKK Sondershausen, Bericht über die Untersuchung in der GO der LPG West-Greussen durch die KPKK 15.8.1962 p.22.

⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/077 Sektor Parteiinformation, Einschätzung der MV im Monat Januar 4.2.1964 p.83.

⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-099 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr.22/64 p.55.

¹⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5/363 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Zweite informatorische Einschätzung....17.5.1966 p.11.

¹¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-179 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht über den Stand der Parteiwahlen...22.11.1966 p.40

failing that to begin a process of party punishments and discussions forcing members to justify their behaviour. Ultimately persistent refusal to attend should have ended in exclusion. An alternative method to such disciplinary proceedings used by party secretaries was simply to report false figures to the *Kreisleitung*, showing higher attendance than was actually the case. Nevertheless the attendance levels at party meetings remained a constant source of worry for functionaries in the agriculture departments of the *Kreisleitungen* because they were regularly found to be lower than in other sectors of the economy.¹²

For the majority of LPG members, the disadvantages of party membership seemed quite clearly to outweigh the benefits, as one disgruntled member of the LPG Olbersleben was reported to put it to recruiters: “what influence does the little man have on things, the big men do just what they want anyway?”¹³ There was also little enthusiasm for the additional work required by participation in party life. Farmers claimed that they had neither the time nor the energy after work to attend party meetings or prepare for them properly by reading up on the political issues of the day, particularly if they had to spend time tending their household plot or livestock.¹⁴ Nor indeed was the prospect of receiving a task assigned by the party particularly welcome. For the ordinary member this could mean taking on extra work in the commissions of the collective farm or at the very least taking an active role in agitating for party policy. For a manager, party membership could result in being selected to advocate SED policy in another (weaker) LPG – again not always an enticing prospect. An attempt to recruit a brigadier in *Kreis* Apolda failed for example as he did not want to be delegated into a struggling LPG. Party membership could thus be seen as making for extra duties with few privileges to balance them out.¹⁵

Supplying Loyal Cadres

It was vital to the SED’s long-term goals of transforming agriculture that leading functionaries in the LPG were loyal to the party as well as being efficient managers of

¹² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-144 BPKK Einschätzung der Parteiverfahren aus dem Jahr 1965 und Erfahrungen aus der Arbeit der PKK im Bezirk Erfurt 21.1.1965 p.185

¹³ ThHStAW SED BPA SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/077 Sektor Parteiinformation, Informationsbericht laut Arbeitsplan 4.6.1965 p.204.

¹⁴ e.g. ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5/363 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane Sektor Operativ Einschätzung zu den Fragen des innerparteilichen Lebens, der Parteierziehung, der politisch-ideologischen und organisatorischen Arbeit der Partei in den GO des Kreises Worbis. 13.10.1965 p.7.

¹⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7 – 500 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Analyse über die Mitgliederbewegung in den ersten 7 Monaten des Jahres 1963 und die Durchführung der Mitgliederversammlungen im Monat Juli. 15.8.1963 p.90.

production. In the new hierarchy of agricultural production, the LPG chairmen, the board members of the LPG and the mid-level managers of the farms (the brigade leaders and above) were conduits of information and authority bringing about the most effective implementation of SED agricultural policy by the collective farmers in their local conditions. Politically reliable, technically proficient and managerially capable LPG cadres had thus to be found to communicate the policies of the regime to LPG members and successfully oversee their implementation in practice.

Owing to the decision to complete collectivisation in a very short space of time, by the time full collectivisation was announced, it was clear that insufficient preparation had been made however to provide LPGs with functionaries, trained in socialist agricultural theory and prepared to organise and run collective farms. Furthermore there were insufficient numbers of politically suitable cadres willing or able to be delegated into leading posts in new or newly expanded LPGs, either from already established LPGs, other sectors of the economy or indeed the state administration. As a consequence it was inevitable that the majority of the new LPG cadres were deficient either in political reliability, managerial skill or technical ability.

During the early 1960s the SED made concerted efforts to improve its position in the LPGs. During 1962 SED members involved more broadly in agricultural administration were given targeted training to take up functionary positions in the collective farms. Furthermore a programme of delegation of functionaries from the district state apparatus, state-owned farms and other stable LPGs as well as the VdgB and the MTS, into politically or financially unstable collective farms was established.¹⁶ Overall the number of mid-level functionaries in the LPGs (such as brigade leaders, agronomists and technicians) who were SED members in the *Bezirk* increased by six times from 1961 to 1962 – the result of an influx of trained and party loyal cadres as well as SED recruitment campaigns in the LPGs.¹⁷ This was important progress as far as the SED leadership was concerned, in making some collective farms more consistently responsive to new developments in collective farm practices and economic administration. Nevertheless in 1963 the *Bezirk* still lacked just under 300 agricultural functionaries with

¹⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-043 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Abt. Org./Kader, Informationsbericht Nr.8/62 pp.149-157.

¹⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-495 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Analyse über den Stand der Entwicklung der PO der LPG, VEG, MTS/RTS...24.5.1963 p.15

suitable political and technical backgrounds, despite having organised the delegation of 208 cadres since the beginning of 1962.¹⁸

The majority of the LPGs then in existence in 1960 were new and barely functional. Most of them had adopted the statute of the Type I collective farm, opting for the minimum degree of collective ownership and collective farming practice allowed them. The running of many of these new collectives thus did not automatically fall immediately into the hands of those who could be relied on politically.¹⁹ Leaders were chosen by members of such LPGs for their farming credentials and local connections not for their subservience to the regime. At the very least, LPG members continued to assert an apolitical stance. As one farmer in an LPG in *Kreis* Heiligenstadt argued “we want practical not political men on the board of our LPG”.²⁰

Nevertheless chairmen of LPGs of all types were certainly soon removed from their posts where they had not proved themselves subsequently to be sufficiently constructive in their leadership of the LPG. By the time of the annual members’ assemblies, at the start of 1962, the question whether or not LPG functionaries wished to remain in their posts and whether or not they were considered suitable – on a political and ideological basis – had become much clearer in the post-Wall climate.²¹ At the same time, the state’s efforts made since 1959 to cover the deficit of both politically reliable and agriculturally trained cadres available for deployment in the LPGs had begun to pay off in a small way. In April 1961 the *Bezirksleitung* had passed a resolution on the improvement of the development of cadres in agriculture and the qualification of the rural workforce as a whole. This resolution foresaw a range of measures to improve the numbers of LPG members with sufficient political as well as practical abilities to advance collective farming. All production plans produced by LPGs in 1961 were to be accompanied by a qualification plan. Delegates of the *Kreisleitungen* attached to the various MTS areas were given the central responsibility of ensuring action was taken, not only to persuade farmers

¹⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-602 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Abt. Org./Kader Kaderpolitische Wertung der Qualifikations der Parteisekretäre in den LPG. 23.3.1963 p.1-4; Abt. Landwirtschaft, Berufsausbildung 26.7.1965 p.26-32; Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht an Gen. Lüddecke – Stand der Qualifizierung der Werktätigen in der soz. Landwirtschaft 27.10.1966 pp.38-39.

¹⁹ ThHStAW BDVP 20.1/353 6. Bericht zur Situation in der Landwirtschaft 24.2.1962 p.43.

²⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-043 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./Kader Informationsbericht Nr. 5/62 Neunter Bericht zur Durchsetzung der Direktive des ZK zur Sicherung der Staatsgrenze West 30.1.1962 p.80.

²¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/4.10/092 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreislandwirtschaftsrat, Einschätzung der durchgeführten JEV und Analyse der Entwicklung der LPG im Jahre 1963, 19.2.1964 pp.2-20.

of the value of qualifications but also to develop some plans reflecting future cadre requirements.²²

As a result of such measures, the number of farmers exposed to basic agricultural training conducted with a view to application in the LPG increased, providing the basis for the development of a future generation of cadres. Although there were many capable farmers, the long-term transformation of agriculture depended upon the creation of professional managers and technicians of collective production. The expansion of the system of qualification in the early 1960s was a crucial first step in this process, altering the basic context in which farmers perceived agriculture and its future development under the SED regime.²³ By the late 1960s as the size of the agricultural work force declined and qualification programmes took effect, the proportion of the total working population in agriculture with a qualification was more than doubled from 16.5% to 39.75% in the *Bezirk*. Perhaps still more significantly the number of LPG members with the technical college certificate increased by 88%. On the basis of these figures it appears that an ever growing number of farmers were qualifying themselves to take up positions as mid- and top-level cadres in the LPGs and were thus now defining their interests and their prospects for promotion in the context of collectivised farming.²⁴ As a consequence, chairmen of LPGs who had failed to prove themselves good managers of collective farmers and who had failed to ensure the farm met minimum production targets increasingly could be replaced with more suitable candidates.²⁵

Nevertheless the proportion of LPGs with both a successful and politically reliable chairman remained low. Moreover, while individual party members in positions of authority in the LPGs were certainly necessary if SED agricultural policy was to be seriously proposed for implementation, such individual figures needed too the backing of others within the collective farm. Without an effective party organisation to back them,

²² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/2/3-373 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Beschluss des Büros der Bezirksleitung über die Verbesserung der Kaderentwicklung in der Landwirtschaft und die Qualifizierung der Werktätigen auf dem Lande. 14.4.1961 p. 87-93; ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/1-009 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokoll der 5. Bezirksleitungssitzung Erfurt am 25.4.1963 p. 116-124; BIV/2/4-299 KPKK Mühlhausen, Bericht über die Untersuchung in der LPG "8.Mai" in Zella 7.4.1964 p.170.

²³ The same opinion with regard to farmers in the GDR as a whole is given in SAPMO B-Arch, DY30/IV 2/7/581 Bericht über einige Schlussfolgerungen bei der Durchsetzung der Grundsätze zur weiteren Entwicklung des Systems der Berufsausbildung in der DDR auf dem Gebiet der Landwirtschaft. 26.2.1960 p.21.

²⁴ The proportion of the agricultural workforce with the basic qualification *Facharbeiterprüfung* rose from 4.5% to 11.5% between 1960 and 1961; while the number of master farmers and those with technical college and university qualifications rose from 2% to 3.5% within Bezirk Erfurt. Statistisches Jahrbuch – Bezirk Erfurt 1970 Teil I. p.126.

²⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/3/278 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, SED Kreisleitung Nordhausen an den 1. Bezirkssekretär 28.2.1963 p.2.

LPG chairmen were slow to develop the financial or agricultural organisation of the collective farm.

New Departures in the Administration of Agriculture

In the mid 1960s the first steps of a radical transformation of agricultural production were to be taken. The reforms of the New Economic System and the announcement of plans to progress to industrial-style production in agriculture were intended to bring about a fundamentally new ethos in all types of LPGs combining both an appeal to farmers' material interests and an insistence on a specifically socialist modernisation of production. Gradual increases in state investment during the mid 1960s brought financial stability to most LPGs and encouraged steps to be taken by collective farmers to increase the scale of production in accordance with SED policies. The processes of economic integration of agriculture into the planned economy and the internal reorganisation of the collective farms which this entailed, created fruitful ground for further conflict between the district state apparatus and LPG members. LPG Type Is began to adopt collective practices more fully and in some cases accepted mergers with neighbouring collective farms. Limited forms of cooperation between LPGs also began to develop. Nonetheless collective farmers retained opinions on the way in which their LPG, and indeed agriculture as a whole, should develop which diverged considerably from those of the SED leadership. Although the SED state had the potential in individual cases to impose its will upon LPG members and their functionaries, the effective implementation of policy in the long term demanded a less confrontational approach, not least in the interests of increasing production levels.

In 1963, the state administration running agriculture was reconfigured with the creation of Agricultural Councils (*Landwirtschaftsräte*) at national, *Bezirk* (*Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat* or BLR) and *Kreis* level (*Kreislandwirtschaftsrat* or KLR). The creation of the agricultural councils promised to result in a better standard of leadership by the state in agricultural matters, with a new professional approach to the production process in the LPGs.²⁶ The agricultural departments within the *Räte der Kreise*, which had overseen the collectivisation process, were considered now too bureaucratic and unsuitable for guiding the development of collectivised farming as a fully incorporated

²⁶ SAPMO B-Arch DY 30 IV/A 2/2.023/15 Büro Grüneberg, Die besondere Beziehung zwischen genossenschaftlicher und staatlicher Leitung nach dem Produktionsprinzip bei der Verwirklichung des NÖSPL (undated 1964) p.162.

sector of the planned economy. The new agricultural councils in contrast promised to be more active, professional bodies with primary responsibility for maximising production in the LPGs. Leading collective farmers were to be explicitly included in the decision-making process at district and regional level with the intention of improving the flow of information into the administration from the collective farms themselves. Thus scientists, veterinary surgeons and other agricultural experts were to work alongside collective farmers to come up with the most effective means of raising production using the latest technologies available.²⁷ This policy of inclusion was also designed to put aside the ‘class’ conflicts of the collectivisation campaign in the interests of pursuing the common goal of raising production levels. As the chairman of the LPG Type III “Rotes Banner” Söllnitz put it to his fellow SED members at the SED *Bezirksparteiaktivtagung* at the end of 1963, economic success depended on including rather than controlling the newer and reluctant members of the LPG. Describing the grounds for the success of his LPG over the previous year, he explained: “We attempted together in our territory to win over those collective farmers who before [collectivisation] had had the best results. That wasn’t easy, since they had been bossed around in the past and their suggestions for improvements to the collective work had been ignored.” With their re-categorisation as the Class of the Collective Farmers, once-reluctant members of the LPG were now in theory to be seen less in terms of their potential for counter-revolution. Rather due consideration was to be given to their abilities as productive farmers, whose opinions on how to improve production in the LPG Type IIIs should, within reason, be taken into account.²⁸

The introduction of this new system of agricultural administration went hand in hand with a number of other proclaimed changes to the conditions in which the LPGs were to function. Plans were announced to begin the development of industrial-scale production in agriculture and were marked by the completion of the transfer and sale of the remaining machinery of the MTS to collective farms. Moreover new economic reforms for agriculture were announced for 1964 as part of the policies of the New Economic System of Planning and Management (*das Neue Ökonomische System der Planung und Leitung* or NÖS) introduced by Ulbricht in 1963. The aim behind both the NÖS reforms in

²⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-051 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokollauszug von der Bürositzung am 8.2.1963.

²⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-38 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 17.12.1963, Referat Genosse Becker – LPG Söllnitz p.68.

agriculture and the creation of the agricultural councils was to shift the emphasis of agricultural administration on to stimulating productivity rather than merely controlling production. The KLRs were to coordinate agricultural plans more realistically with accurate assessments of the productive capacities and profiles of the LPGs in each district.²⁹ Equally, with the reforms of the NÖS, it was expected that LPG members would be encouraged by a system of profit incentives to improve productivity. At the same time planning of production would, in theory at least, be organised with greater input from collective farmers rather than foisted upon the LPGs by the district administration. To this end the number of products for which administrative plan targets would be set, was reduced and the dual price system for production over and above the plan was abandoned for arable crops.³⁰ As the head director of the produce purchasing organisation at *Bezirk* level mentioned in December 1963, he expected the introduction of the New Economic System into agriculture to resolve past inconsistencies between the plans of the farms themselves and those of the district and regional administrations.³¹ Following the grim upheavals of the collectivisation campaign and the struggles of the first years of collective farming, there was much optimism among loyal supporters of the SED regime that the NÖS and the agricultural councils would bring both increased production and greater unity within agriculture.³²

Despite this apparent optimism and the at least rhetorical emphasis on conciliation, neither collective farmers nor all LPG functionaries were quick to embrace attempts to reform their LPG. The increased revenues which accompanied changes to price regulations as part of the NÖS were welcomed by LPG members. However there remained considerable suspicion of any new measures which appeared to restrict the incomes of LPG members or diminish or deprive collective farmers of control over their funds, land or livestock in the future. The KLRs' attempts to persuade LPG members to adopt greater degrees of collective use of land, livestock and machinery, and set about the implementation of more refined degrees of financial organisation to stimulate production achieved only limited success.

²⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/1-009 Protokoll der 5. Bezirksleitungssitzung am 25.4.1963, Referat Genosse Lüdecke p.38.

³⁰ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY 30 IV/A 2/2.023/15 Die Weiterentwicklung des NÖSPL 16.06.1964 p.22.

³¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-038 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 17.12.1963, Beitrag Genosse Riemann, Hauptdirektor der VVEAB pp.131-135.

³² ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/102 Information von der am 24.4.1963 stattgefundenen Aussprache im Sekretariat der Nationalen Front 17.5.1963 p.3.

Hostility to Change: the Limits of Reform

Opposition to outside interference was especially strong in the LPG Type I where, not least owing to the lack of LPG functionaries or members who had joined the SED, mistrust outweighed support for state interference in agriculture. The fear of losing still further control over their land, livestock and machinery was fundamental cause for LPG Type I members to be sceptical of all proposals to restructure the work organisation or reform the financial arrangements of the LPG. For much of the early 1960s the district agricultural councils struggled therefore to ensure the implementation of the basic practices and work organisation of an efficient collective farm in LPG Type I. It was one thing to establish the LPG as an administrative institution, replete with a hierarchy of command, responsible commissions and the routines of collective democracy, capable of coordinating collective work on arable land. It was another to develop a functioning collective farm which was taking steps to reduce and control the element of private ownership among its members. Establishing collective livestock herds, the organisation of collective farming of meadow land and of household plots; increasing the level of accumulated capital rather than the level of consumption of profits as income; reducing the significance of contributed land in the distribution of income, introducing the internal competition between members and establishing performance-related pay were all steps which LPG Type I members sought, with greater and lesser degrees of success, to resist. With the implementation of each of these measures, the prospect of the loss of both individual control over private production and the profits arising from it came nearer.

To LPG Type I members, there was not much to recommend merger with a neighbouring LPG Type III. Merger meant not only having a smaller voice in the running of the farm, it very likely meant coming under the direct influence of an SED party organisation. Most obviously the transfer of private livestock into collective use amounted to something akin to expropriation as far as some LPG Type I farmers were concerned. The monetary value of the contribution required from Type I farmers joining LPG Type III was felt to be exaggerated too, while the animals and machinery contributed were often thought to have been undervalued. Type I farmers had little confidence either in the greater profitability of collective livestock holdings and indeed expected to suffer financial

hardship in the LPG Type III. As can be seen from Figure 2. below, between September 1960 and September 1970 the number of LPG Type Is in existence in the *Bezirk* dropped at a fairly steady rate, while the number of LPG Type IIIs remained stable. In a few cases, mergers, or rather take-overs, undoubtedly occurred with LPG Type IIIs despite the opposition of the majority of LPG Type I members, although what proportion of mergers occurred on this basis is uncertain. Even where ballots of the LPG Type I members were held, complaints were sometimes heard from collective farmers that they had been forced to vote under duress or misled as to what they were voting for.

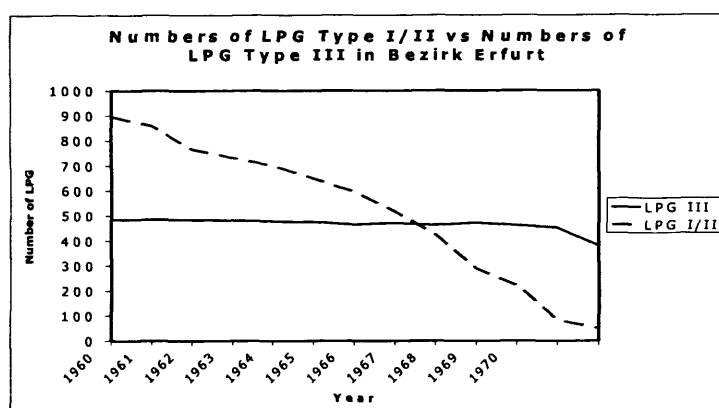


Figure 2.³³

Nevertheless on the whole the staff of KLRs were aware of the problems created by forcing through mergers of LPGs without sufficient preparation, if not the whole hearted enthusiasm, of collective farmers. The potential damage to production levels as well as the financial stability of LPGs as a result of the discontent of collective farmers and general disorganisation within the collective farm had been clearly demonstrated in many LPGs in the course of collectivisation. Mergers of LPG Type Is with LPG Type IIIs were necessary to the transformation of agriculture in both the short and long term. As repositories of money, machinery and good stock as well as farming expertise, LPG Type Is potentially provided the solution to struggling LPG Type IIIs in need of all these resources. Pressure from the KLRs on LPG Type Is to merge with neighbouring LPGs, particularly other LPG Type Is, was motivated too by practical concern for organising more efficient farming of arable land, enabling larger plantations of single crops. It could also be motivated by the

³³ *Statistische Jahrbücher, Bezirk Erfurt 1960-1975* (Erfurt: Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik, Bezirksstelle Erfurt: 1961-1976)

recognition that very small LPG Type Is had very little prospect of sustaining the personnel or the machinery to provide the increases in production necessary to remain profitable in the future. At the start of 1964 nine LPGs Types I and II in *Kreis Sömmerda* were singled out by the SED *Kreisleitung* as having no real future as independent economic units. Consequently the provision of financial support from the KLRs was made contingent on these LPGs planning to merge with a neighbouring farm.³⁴

The feeling was widespread in rural communities that having once been forced into the LPGs, farmers should at least be now left to get on with improving production without unwanted state interference. In particular attempts to gauge labour productivity via the introduction of an official documented competition between farmers or the creation of work norms were still widely met with opposition during the early 1960s, particularly in LPG Type Is. The introduction of schemes to increase labour productivity was regarded at best as an unnecessary administrative burden by LPG farmers and functionaries.³⁵ At worst the socialist competition was recognised and rejected as a means of state interference in the running of the LPGs and a lever with which to force increased productivity. The organisation of a competition internal to the LPG, between individual members, appeared too to undermine LPG members' conception of their special identity as farmers, as naturally hard working and dedicated to their land and livestock, putting them rather in the same bracket as mercenary industrial wage labourers. In the words of the chairman of the LPG Type I in Nottleben, *Kreis Erfurt-Land*: "competition is an expression of mistrust. It suggests that farmers are lazy and are only motivated to work by money."³⁶

Moreover competition between farmers in the same collective farm was seen as unnecessarily divisive. LPG functionaries already had difficulty in maintaining harmonious relations between the various different members and were unwilling to heighten tension further by adding money to the equation. In August 1962 only 10 of the 96 LPGs in the district of Gotha had drawn up an internal competition, with LPG chairmen arguing that "competition causes bad blood" and even that competition

³⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/092 KLR – Produktionsleitung, Einschätzung der durchgeführten Jahresendversammlungen und Analyse der Entwicklung der LPG im Jahre 1963. 19.2.1964 pp.2-20.

³⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./Kader, Wie werden in den Leitungssitzungen und Mitgliederversammlungen entsprechend der Beschlüsse der Partei, die wichtigsten Probleme in den Mittelpunkt gestellt? 25.7.1962 pp.35-48.

³⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./Kader, Information 19/62 30.7.1962 pp.49-57.

“represents an illegal increase in the work unit”.³⁷ In April the following year reports on LPG Type Is in the *Bezirk* as a whole reported the commonplace opinion of farmers that: “Competition brings disharmony in the LPG, especially between the older and the younger collective farmers. Competition does not increase work productivity.”³⁸ Reiterating the rhetoric of the labour movement in the Weimar period, an explicit comparison was made between capitalist exploitation and exploitation under state socialism: “today we say competition and before it was called piece work and piece work is murder (*Akkord ist Mord*).”³⁹ Other administrative methods designed to stimulate productivity in LPGs were also considered with scepticism. In February 1963 information reports on the mood of the population pointed to a number of expressions of opposition to any form of performance-related pay in the collectives on the basis that “material incentive leads to mutual chicanery between individual farmers; payment according to the final product means discrimination against older farmers since they can’t put in the work the young ones can.”⁴⁰ Instructors from the KLRs thus met with arguments which dismissed these innovations as unnecessary or even as downright destructive. Comments such as “competition is just passing fad” or even “our LPG is too small to run a competition,” were accompanied by more serious complaints as to the divisiveness of competition.⁴¹ By November 1963 it was noted that socialist competition was still being resisted, with only 228 out of 723 LPGs Types I and II in the *Bezirk* participating.⁴² By the beginning of 1964, the KLR in *Kreis Sömmerda* could claim only 8 LPG Type Is had developed a good degree of collective work, which included adopting both internal and external competition and some form of performance related pay. At the other end of the spectrum, 6 LPGs were found to be still functioning as collectives in name only. The vast majority of LPGs Types I and II had made some but by no means enough steps to implement “good collective practice.”⁴³

³⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-44 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Org./Kader, Kurzinformation 26/62 13.8.1962 p.87-91; Abt. Org./Kader, Sektor Parteinformation, Faktenmaterial: Wie wird mit dem Ministerratsbeschluss vom 17.9.1962 gearbeitet pp.441-449.

³⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/9.01-606 SED Bezirksleitung Ideologische Kommission, Arbeitsgruppe der Ideologischen Kommission, Information und Schlussfolgerungen...3.4.1963 p.17.

³⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/9.01-606 SED Bezirksleitung Ideologische Kommission, Arbeitsgruppe der Ideologischen Kommission, Information und Schlussfolgerungen...3.4.1963 p.20.

⁴⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-380 Abt. Parteiorgane, Abt. Org./Kader an das ZK, Abt. Org./Kader, Informationsbericht Nr.4/63 18.2.1963 p.108.

⁴¹ ThHStAW RdB L599 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Analyse über die ökonomische Entwicklung der LPG im Jahre 1963 undated.

⁴² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-38 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 17.12.1963, Referat Genosse Thieme, Stellv. Leiter des Büros für Landwirtschaft p.22.

⁴³ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/092 KLR – Produktionsleitung, Politische Wertung über die Entwicklung der LPG des Kreises Sömmerda im Jahre 1963 13.4.1964 p.25.

Having implemented the highest degree of collectivisation of property on the farm, in contrast to the LPG Type Is, the LPG Type IIIs were expected to lead the way in the implementation of the latest elements of economic planning and administration in farming. Their leading functionaries tended more often than in the LPG Type Is to be members of the SED and the size of the party organisation tended too to be larger, making for a stronger base of support for the latest methods or work organisation proposed by the SED leadership. As a consequence Type III LPGs were often quicker to develop new incentive-based pay structures and to develop the conditions for specialised and industrial-scale production. In *Bezirk* Erfurt as a whole, there was some evidence that Type III LPGs were beginning to prove themselves more capable of producing efficiently. The average income of a member working full-time in an LPG Type III rose from 3,360 Marks in 1962 to just over 4000 Marks in 1963 according to figures from the BLR.⁴⁴ Type III LPGs were able too to close the gap in productivity on the average LPG Type I and II in some parts of the *Bezirk*. According to figures on volume of produce (as measured in grain units) per hectare, production in Type IIIs in *Kreis* Sömmerda was able to match that of Type I/II in livestock and was only slightly lower in crop production in 1963. Nevertheless there remained in 1963 a large number of loss-making Type III LPGs, which were reliant on considerable credits and subsidies from the state, and many more in which working conditions left much to be desired.⁴⁵ There was thus much scepticism of any change which did not immediately promise to improve the conditions under which these LPG members worked or, worse still, which threatened to compromise their incomes. Arguments were made in several LPGs against payment according to work norms and the introduction of performance-related pay, such as: “what do we need norms for? The main thing is that the work units are correct.” In the LPG Type III Tuttleben in *Kreis* Gotha, the women of the field brigade were reported to have expressed the opinion: “Our menfolk had to do piece-work 20 years ago. You lot (i.e. Socialists) are against piece-work, but the performance principle is no different.”⁴⁶ Despite improving incomes, it was clear that at the start of

⁴⁴ ThHStAW RdB L599 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Analyse über die ökonomische Entwicklung der LPG im Jahre 1963 undated.

⁴⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/092 KLR – Produktionsleitung, Politische Wertung über die Entwicklung der LPG des Kreises Sömmerda im Jahre 1963 13.4.1964 pp.21-39.

⁴⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-380 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Informationsbericht Nr.16 18.6.1963 pp.344-354.

1964, a large proportion of LPG members in the Type IIIs continued to suspect the state via the LPG of seeking to exploit them as workers.⁴⁷

Leading functionaries in the LPG Type IIIs too resented the burden of implementing management methods which caused disquiet among the members and objected to the greater level of responsibility and accountability foisted upon them by the detailed gauges of the LPG's economic performance now demanded by the KLRs. In 1965, reasonably clement weather over the previous year and a degree of success in the use of machinery collectively had led to a much improved harvest around the *Bezirk*. As a result the members' assemblies at the start of the year were marked less than ever by signs of disgruntlement. To the dismay of the BLR, LPG chairmen however failed to suggest to their members that their improved incomes were a direct consequence of the systems of economic incentive which had so far been introduced.⁴⁸ Even, it was noted, in the most advanced of the LPG Type IIIs, the internal competition was widely thought to serve no purpose.⁴⁹

Assessing the discussions and statements made at district farmers' conferences held around the *Bezirk* in March 1965, the BLR found that there was still a considerable shortfall in the extent to which economic reforms had been implemented in the LPGs.⁵⁰ Socialist business economics (*sozialistische Betriebswirtschaft*) – a collective term used to describe the combination of administrative regulations, economic levers and systems of material incentive which LPGs were ideally to employ under the NÖS – appeared neither to be fully understood nor accepted by collective farmers and LPG functionaries alike. An information report on the state of the implementation of the NÖS in May 1965 pointed to some sudden progress having been made in winning over LPG cadres in the *Bezirk*. Following a series of lectures and a propaganda campaign to help LPG chairmen and accountants understand socialist business economics, twice as many LPG Type IIIs in the *Bezirk* had reportedly reached an advanced stage in the implementation of various forms of performance-related pay and strict accounting methods. Nevertheless proposals to index LPG functionaries' pay directly to the financial results of the LPG still provoked

⁴⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/092 KLR – Produktionsleitung, Einschätzung der durchgeführten Jahresendversammlungen und Analyse der Entwicklung der LPG im Jahre 1963, 19.2.1964 pp.2-20.

⁴⁸ ThHStAW L1082 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Fernschreiben an den Vorsitzenden und Produktionsleiter des KLWR 19.1.1965.

⁴⁹ ThHStAW L1081 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Berichterstattung an die Bezirksleitung der SED, Abt. Parteiorgane 18.1.1965.

⁵⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-112 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Einschätzung der Kreisbauernkonferenzen im Bezirk Erfurt, Schlussfolgerungen 29.3.1965 p.152.

opposition among both brigadiers and LPG chairmen. There was no sense, they argued, in which they as managers could guarantee that the plan targets were fulfilled.⁵¹

If chairmen of the LPG Type IIIs were not always supportive of new methods by which to run their collective farms, the leaders of LPG Type Is were still slower to insist on the implementation of changes in theirs. The threat to their livelihoods and their independence, which farmers in the LPG Type I perceived to come from the KLR's proposals for the introduction of performance-related pay or greater collectivisation of land or livestock, prevented such issues even coming up for discussion in some LPG Type Is in 1964. In Flarchheim, *Kreis* Erfurt-Land, where the LPG Type I was among the most successful in the district, LPG members were reportedly easily able to resist attempts by the LPG's directing board to introduce performance-related pay and socialist competition. It was suggested even that the LPG members would seek to vote those board members out of their positions if they continued to advocate such measures.⁵² Elsewhere in 1964 attempts to introduce collective farming of pasture land and develop collective livestock herds continued too to fail in LPGs Types I and II.⁵³ Although by May 1965 in the *Bezirk* as a whole 72% of LPG Type Is had some sort of collective livestock holding alongside privately kept animals, more than half continued to farm their pasture land on an individual basis.⁵⁴

LPGs which resisted any form of change were most numerous in those parts of the *Bezirk* where LPG Type Is predominated and the SED had failed to establish an effective network of party organisations among either collective farmers, or indeed the rural population in general. This was particularly the case in the hilly north east of the *Bezirk* where the strength of the SED was limited by the resilience of close-knit Catholic communities and where the terrain and the pre-collectivisation pattern of land ownership precluded the rapid development of industrial-scale crop production or intensive livestock

⁵¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-112 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Einschätzung der Arbeitsgruppe der Bezirksleitung über die Führungstätigkeit des Sekretariats der SED Kreisleitung Nordhausen p.100-119; BIV/2/5-382 Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr.16/65 29.5.1965 pp.181-191; BIV/2/7-588 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht über die politische Führungstätigkeit zur Herausbildung von Kooperationsbeziehungen 1965 p.476-484; BIV/2/5-382 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr.16/65 29.5.1965 pp.181-191.

⁵² ThHStAW NF 172 Bezirkssekretariat, Vorlage an das Büro für Landwirtschaft bei der Bezirksleitung der SED 13.6.1964 p.117.

⁵³ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-084 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht 7.4.1964 p.16.

⁵⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-112 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Einschätzung der Arbeitsgruppe der Bezirksleitung über die Führungstätigkeit des Sekretariats der SED Kreisleitung Nordhausen p.100-119; BIV/2/5-382 Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr.16/65 29.5.1965 p.181-191; BIV/2/7-588 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft Bericht über die politische Führungstätigkeit zur Herausbildung von Kooperationsbeziehungen 1965 p.476-484; BIV/2/5-382 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr.16/65 29.5.1965 pp.181-191.

holding. In *Kreis Worbis* suggestions that LPGs should begin to specialise production in single crops or in livestock were thus met with scepticism from farmers. Establishing a coherent arrangement of fields for concentrated production of a single crop was compromised in any case by the patchwork of household plots and dividing walls and hedges which had yet to be removed. More seriously farmers refused to countenance such measures on the grounds that they were just the beginning of a plan to expropriate farmers completely. In the neighbouring districts of Mühlhausen and Nordhausen, farmers similarly argued that concentration of production was just going to turn “farmers” into “labourers” or that it would make LPGs too dependent on one another to be efficient.⁵⁵ The head of the district ideological commission in the SED *Kreisleitung* Worbis reported on the ongoing of resistance of farmers to change at the end of 1964. At the root of the problem, he noted, was the fact that LPG chairmen agreed with the SED in principle but when it came to putting policies into practice were either unwilling or unable to see them through.⁵⁶ Where LPG functionaries were themselves in favour of implementing reforms, the unopposed front of resistance presented by LPG members in those collective farms where no or few political ties or loyalties to the SED regime existed meant they found little support within the LPGs.⁵⁷

Progress was made, at least on paper in many LPG Type Is and LPG Type IIIs around the *Bezirk* following the holding of members’ assemblies at the start of 1966.⁵⁸ Approximately three quarters of LPGs, it was reported, had introduced forms of material incentive making incomes dependent on specific improvements in productivity.⁵⁹ Nevertheless the number of LPGs which had instituted the full raft of economic reforms which were supposed to drive the NÖS in agriculture remained limited. LPG Type Is in areas such as *Kreis Worbis*, remained particularly resistant to the introduction of performance-related pay, indexed payment of leading cadres, collective farming of household plots and grassland or higher rates of capital accumulation.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-096 SED Bezirksleitung Abteilung Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht 18/64 20.8.1964 p.45.

⁵⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-042 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung, Büro für Landwirtschaft am 18.12.1964, Beitrag Genosse Storost, Leiter der Ideologischen Kommission der SED Kreisleitung Worbis p.165.

⁵⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5/360 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der Kreisparteiaktivtagung Worbis am 2.6.1965, 4.6.1965 p.1.

⁵⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-565 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft Einschätzung der bisherigen Ergebnisse der Durchführung der JEV...12.1.1966 p.212.

⁵⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5/384 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr.6/66 25.2.1966 p.14.

⁶⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-159 SED Kreisleitung Worbis, Sekretariat, Bericht über die Führung der polit.-ideologischen Arbeit nach dem 11. Plenum...3.6.1966 p.29.

Conclusion

During the course of the 1960s the problem of introducing new working practices into the LPGs was partially solved by a process of qualification, expansion of the party organisations, merger and cooperation. Economic reform and the transformation of the conditions of production (however gradual) were nevertheless not warmly received by collective farmers. Functionaries of the KLRs continued to face serious difficulties in persuading members and cadres of the LPGs to accept policies which at best they did not understand and at worst to which they maintained a fundamental ideological opposition. The long-term goals of SED agricultural policy ran too often contrary to collective farmers' own conception of their best interests and their own sense of good practice. As a consequence the implementation of the economic reform required to establish specialised agriculture on an industrial scale and integrate agricultural production into a comprehensive system of economic planning required considerable time and effort. Until loyal and capable cadres occupied the leading positions in most LPG and reliable political lobbies had been established at the grassroots of farming, it remained problematic for the regime effectively and forcefully to persuade collective farmers – particularly those in the LPG Type Is - that they should and would change their working practices in accordance with SED policy. LPG chairmen clearly had to be responsive to the demands placed upon them by the district agricultural councils to implement reforms and persuade their members to support the state's plans for developing agricultural production. However they were also bound, if they were to retain the support of their fellow farmers and continue to run a successful farm, to act in their members' interests and respond to their concerns. Attaining good production results and showing themselves not to be hostile to SED agricultural policy – matters on which their future careers depended – entailed balancing and mediating these twin pressures. As long as LPG members sought to assert interests which did not appear to be served by SED agricultural policy and as long as LPG functionaries lacked the desire or the strength and political support on the ground to overcome divergent opinions, the transformation of agriculture remained a slow process.

By the completion of the administrative collectivisation of farms in *Bezirk* Erfurt, as in the rest of the GDR in spring 1960, there was a basic deficiency of personnel in the LPGs,

but particularly in the LPG Type Is, who would support the introduction of measures designed to reform the financial and agricultural organisation of the collective farms. Steps had been taken since the 1950s to provide sufficient numbers of cadres, loyal to the SED, and trained to run the LPGs in accordance with SED policy. Steps had also been taken to recruit LPG members to the SED in order to create a lobby of support for SED policies within each of the collective farms. However in the early 1960s the deficiency of personnel remained a problem. Despite the construction of the Wall, the stabilisation of the LPGs in the aftermath, and development of a more production- orientated administration for agriculture, the quality and quantity of loyal LPG cadres and LPG members remained insufficient to persuade collective farmers as a whole of the value of further changes to the organisation of the LPG, not least where these changes appeared to expose the individual farmer to further outside interference. The existence of the LPG had been put beyond doubt; how and how quickly it would develop remained a matter of some contention.

CHAPTER 5

Resistance, Compromise and “Cooperation”

“Cooperation means making sure other LPGs have a higher value of work unit; bringing advantages for some but disadvantages for others; and it means that we’d have to give up what we’ve achieved to help those who have been left behind.”¹ (Machine Brigade Leader, Wundersleben, Kreis Sömmerda, 1966)

By the mid 1960s, the LPGs were no longer a new or controversial phenomenon. The context in which farming took place in the GDR continued nevertheless to shift, as the SED leadership continued to pursue a radical transformation of the conditions of agricultural production. Levels of recruitment to the SED and levels of more and less advanced degrees of qualification among farmers continued to increase, as the size of the agricultural workforce declined. The economic pressures on members of Type I to establish collective livestock holdings or merge with LPG Type IIIs ensured the extent of private farming was being continually scaled back. Moreover new technology was beginning to raise yields, and in turn improve working conditions and incomes for the agricultural workforce. Nevertheless growing uncertainty as to their future in a reformed system of socialist agriculture among both LPG farmers and functionaries continued to limit the pace and the extent to which the agricultural councils were in a position to drive the implementation of SED agricultural policy. With no guarantee of financial security there were few members of the LPG willing to compromise what stability they had thus far achieved.

The Early Development of Cooperation

Parallel to the debate over the implementation of the NÖS in the LPGs was the issue of how to establish the conditions for more cost-intensive mechanised production. By the mid 1960s, after a series of mergers, most LPGs had reached a stable position financially and responding to the policies of the NÖS had raised significant levels of accumulated capital. This alongside considerable improvements in the numbers and capacity of tractors, harvesters and other machinery available in the GDR made mechanised crop production on a larger scale and the beginnings of large-scale intensive livestock production possible.

¹ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/077 Sektor Parteinformation, Informationsbericht laut Arbeitsplan 4.4.1966 p.247.

However it was still not clear what was the most effective means by which collective farmers would be brought to combine their resources. Solutions to these problems presented themselves in two forms – the development of cooperative relations between two or more LPGs or the merger of collective farms together to form a Grand LPG² combining crop and livestock production on a larger scale under a single leadership.

There were strong tendencies among some LPG leaders to seek to develop the scale of production under their control.³ In most cases however the KLRs were reluctant to endorse mergers between LPGs across more than one village during the early 1960s, for fear this would limit further possibilities for a more effective rationalisation of resources in later years. Moreover the development of cooperative relations did not preclude but rather provided the basis for possible mergers in the future.

Cooperation between LPGs could occur in a number of different forms and had begun to be developed on a small-scale since the early 1960s. LPGs had already started to combine their efforts on construction projects, cooperate on building up stocks of animals cooperatively between the collectives and form joint land improvement cooperatives. As the 1960s developed LPGs were encouraged to expand their participation in local cooperative projects particularly with regard to the use of land and machinery as increased yields would enable the GDR to become less dependent on importing feed for livestock. To achieve greater yields LPGs had to be encouraged to combine their resources to increase the fertility of the soil and to move on to ever more effective use of the large machinery now available. While few farmers objected in principle to cooperation where there was mutual benefit, there was however considerable suspicion of what cooperation might lead to and of how the finances of their LPG would be affected.

At the start of 1964 the BLR claimed 28 cooperative building organisations (*Zwischenbetriebliche Bauorganisationen*, ZBO) already existed, and the goal of establishing one ZBO in each MTS region by the end of the year seemed attainable.⁴ A few LPGs had also begun to build up joint livestock production facilities and combine

² Grand LPG serves here as a translation for the term "*Gross-LPG*".

³ Examples of LPG members opinions to this effect may be found in ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/2-022 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung zu den Fragen und Aufgaben der soz. Landwirtschaft am 7.3.1968 Beitrag Genossin Zessin p.103; SED BPA IV/B/2/13-378 SED Bezirksleitung Einschätzung über das Einwohnerforum in der Grenzgemeinde Berka/Werra Kr. Eisenach 27.1.1969 p.1.

⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-084 SED Bezirksleitung, Abt. Landwirtschaft Konzeption für das ländliche Bauwesen im Bezirk Erfurt für das Jahr 1964..20.3.1964 p.127; IV/A/2/3-122 SED Kreisleitung Nordhausen, Bericht über die Entwicklung der massenpolitischen Arbeit...25.6.1965 p.20.

their herds forming separate cooperative entities responsible to each of the constituent LPGs. These were known as Inter-collective Establishments (*Zwischengenossenschaftliche Einrichtungen* or ZGE) and formed the basis for early attempts to concentrate and specialise in livestock production. Another early form of cooperation concerned land improvement projects. Given the obvious mutual advantages of schemes draining and irrigating land over a wide area and the extent of manpower and machines often required by such projects, the formation of so-called melioration cooperatives (*Meliorationsgenossenschaften*) did not automatically raise objections among LPG members either. Assessing developments in March 1965 the BLR estimated that approximately 15% of the LPGs in the *Bezirk* were involved in some form of cooperation.

The degree of openness to the idea of establishing cooperative relations between LPGs among collective farmers and the leading functionaries of the LPGs varied across the *Bezirk*. *Kreis* Erfurt-Land and *Kreis* Weimar had the most cooperating collective farms. In contrast in *Kreis* Nordhausen and *Kreis* Mühlhausen very few LPGs had entered into any form of cooperative relationship. Part of the reason for this difference, even at this early stage in the development of cooperation was the different solutions which cooperative relations offered the LPGs in different parts of the country. In the uplands of the *Bezirk* where the LPGs were small, mainly of Type I and arable land not very easily farmed on a large-scale, cooperation was immediately worthwhile above all for building larger, more efficient livestock sheds, silage and storage facilities. This required LPG members to be willing to invest considerable sums in construction projects which would bind them together with their neighbours for years to come as well as committing them, if they belonged to an LPG Type I, to scale back their private livestock.⁵ Cooperative relations thus represented a degree of commitment to the long-term transformation of the conditions of ownership for members of LPG Type Is which they considered neither practicable nor desirable. At the SED *Bezirksparteiaktivtagung* in December 1964 it was reported that among a number of farmers particularly in the smaller LPGs, cooperative relations with their neighbours were rejected outright. Members of the LPG Type I in Görmar, *Kreis* Mühlhausen allegedly believed: “cooperative relations have the purpose of

⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IVA/2/3-112 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Der Vorsitzende u. Prod.leiter an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung der SED Betr: Schlussfolgerungen zur Verallgemeinerung der Erfahrungen bei der Herstellung kooperativer Beziehungen im Bereich Obernissa 18.3.1965 p.33.

enabling large LPG to swallow small collective farms and enrich themselves at their expense.”⁶ In *Kreis Nordhausen* members of small LPGs under 100 hectares also doubted the value of cooperation, raising questions such as: “aren’t we giving up our independence with the creation of cooperative relations? Won’t we be done over by stronger LPGs?”⁷

In contrast in the flat lands in the heart of the *Bezirk* where large-scale arable plantations were possible, cooperative institutions were set up mainly to deal with auxiliary processes from crop production such as feed preparation and the transport and drying of crops. Not only was participation in such forms of cooperation not necessarily an overwhelming commitment which entailed compromising the independence of a significant facet of (private) production, it was also of clear and immediate benefit to the LPGs involved.⁸ An analysis of the extent of cooperation in *Kreis Erfurt-Land* in 1965 noted thus that all of the LPGs in the district belonged to one of 17 so-called Cooperative Communities (*Kooperationsgemeinschaften* or KOGs) of two or more cooperating LPGs.⁹

From the SED’s point of view cooperation was an ideal solution to many of the problems undermining agriculture’s development since collectivisation. The imbalance in the economic and social development of individual LPGs could begin to be evened out once neighbouring collective farms began to share the burdens of improving production facilities. The influence of politically loyal collective farmers and technically capable cadres was given the opportunity to spread beyond the confines of a single LPG. At the same time the possibilities increased for establishing industrial-scale specialised production above all in joint arable farming between LPGs. Cooperation provided too a halfway house to ease the transition for small LPG Type Is on their way to a merger with a larger neighbour. The process of working together brought with it necessarily both greater familiarity and steps towards greater conformity in the financial organisation of the LPGs, potentially making for a smoother merger. However these arguments in favour of cooperative relations provided the basis too for much of the opposition from collective farmers, who remained resistant to interference in the internal workings of their collective farm. Cooperation threatened to subordinate LPG members’ interests to outside influence,

⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-042 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 18.12.1964 Referat (unnamed) p.70.

⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-122 SED Kreisleitung Nordhausen, Bericht über die Entwicklung der massenpolitischen Arbeit...25.6.1965 p.20.

⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-112 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Schlussfolgerungen zur Verallgemeinerung...18.3.1965 p.31.

⁹ ThHStAW RdB, Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Produktionsleitung, Kurzanalyse über den Kreis Erfurt-Land, Bereich Landwirtschaft undated 1965.

transform their way of life and working practices and potentially rob them of their independence altogether. The progress of cooperation between LPGs depended therefore heavily on the perception of collective farmers of their status and future within agriculture in the GDR.

Farming practices had changed since 1960. Investment in construction and machinery for agriculture had brought with it new routines and new expectations for all those involved in the LPGs. In five years of full collectivisation, approximately one in five members of the agricultural workforce had left the profession, while the number of tractors available to the LPGs had doubled and the number of combine harvesters had tripled, the total number of LPGs had been reduced through mergers and a number of LPG Type Is had begun to develop collective livestock holdings. The process of transforming agriculture from small-scale, unspecialised and un-concentrated production methods, over which little direct control could be exerted, into an industrial-scale specialised and concentrated system of production responsive to state demand and more easily subordinated to administrative control had begun with collectivisation. Establishing cooperative relations between LPGs promised to move this process forward. The long-term consequences of developing cooperative relations between LPGs represented however a far more dramatic transformation of rural existence in the GDR even than collectivisation.

Grounds for Continuing Hostility to Cooperation

As a result of the expansion and specialisation of production which went hand in hand with cooperation between neighbouring LPGs, collective farmers expected not only changes to their daily work routine and the location of the work place but also a change in their status as farmers – at the very least a dilution of their rights as theoretical land owners. Both collective farmers and LPG chairmen who had remained suspicious of the impact on them – on their status as farmers and stakeholders in the LPG - of a rapid transformation of agricultural production remained thus keen to limit the speed with which such measures were implemented. Their reticence was exacerbated by a desire to consolidate and a growing sense of identification and possession of the LPG among its members which rejected the prospect of their LPG losing independent control over its

wealth, land and machinery. Where in 1960 the individual farmer had protested against any incursion on his private ownership of his land or animals, or his independence, now LPG members acted as one to protect the resources and independence of their LPG.

The 1st Secretary of the SED *Bezirksleitung* was at pains to make it clear to leading party members working in agriculture that the precondition for an LPG's participation in cooperation and subsequent merger ought to be mutual consent. Appearing to respond to complaints that LPG Type IIIs had with state and party agreement in fact exploited neighbouring Type Is he cautioned agricultural functionaries attending the SED *Bezirksparteiaktivtagung* in December 1965: "You can't do things, and I say it quite openly, in such a way that the LPG Type IIIs pillage the Type Is."¹⁰ Throughout the *Bezirk*, LPG Type I members and their chairmen nevertheless remained wary of establishing cooperative relations which threatened to lead to exploitation of their resources and ultimately loss of their independence. In some cases their fears were justified. The BLR clearly intended that the district agricultural councils should concentrate their efforts on establishing cooperative relations between neighbouring LPG Type Is and LPG Type IIIs where the latter were in clear need of the resources of the former.¹¹ During 1965 and 1966 the KLRs thus sought to increase the pressure on the smallest LPGs to develop cooperative relations with their neighbours in order to maximise the scale on which production could be undertaken.

The desire to consolidate what had already been achieved hardened rejection of cooperation even where KLR functionaries argued that independent production was no longer reasonable given the machinery now available. Those LPGs which had begun to achieve a level of profitability were unwilling to jeopardise either this success or their independence, calling upon the authorities of party and state to leave them be for a while.¹² Members of all LPG Types argued that they would rather buy their own machinery with their own money and use it independently even if they weren't able to maximise its effect.¹³ LPG chairmen, charged with brokering effective relations with one

¹⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-043 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 7.12.1965, Referat Genosse Bräutigam p.176.

¹¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-112 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Einschätzung der Kreisbauernkonferenzen im Bezirk Erfurt, Schlussfolgerungen p.152.

¹² ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-382 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr.16/65 29.5.1965 p.181.

¹³ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-382 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr.26/65 19.8.1965 p.333.

another, clearly were convinced that their LPGs had much more to lose than others in the long-term as a result of cooperation.

In this context it is unsurprising that attempts at the joint deployment of machinery belonging to more than one LPG during the harvest in 1965 were often marred by mutual suspicion. So-called integrated deployments (*Komplexeinsätze*) of machinery from a number of different LPGs at the same time demanded a clear plan for the order of work and a clear division of authority. Such matters however had rarely been finally and definitely agreed upon in August 1965 as LPG chairmen were reluctant to commit themselves to measures which might disadvantage their LPG. The few attempts at the integrated deployment of machinery by groups of LPGs during the harvest in 1965 tended thus to breakdown. LPG functionaries, it was reported, tended to see to their own concerns before helping their partners in the cooperation.¹⁴

Attempts to arrange informal cooperation in the use of machinery between some LPGs in the course of the harvest also tended to break down rather quickly amid confusion and mutual suspicion. Given the importance of exploiting good weather conditions and the potential danger to any crop left too long in the field, the leading functionaries of the individual LPGs were understandably concerned not to lose out to their neighbours in the timely use of machinery. Quite apart from the loss of income, appearing to be hoodwinked by one's neighbours was a sign of weakness which few LPG cadres did not resent, and which few LPG members did not scorn in their leaders.

Without functioning cooperative councils (*Kooperationsräte* or KORs) to coordinate the resources in men and machines of the constituent LPGs of the cooperative communities and no formal agreements on how the harvest was to proceed, LPG leaders soon insisted on taking back their own machinery and equipment to harvest independently.¹⁵ Even in the more advanced districts such as *Kreis* Erfurt-Land, harvest machine systems were deployed independently by individual LPGs. There were even instances of large LPG Type IIIs refusing "socialist aid" to their neighbouring collective farms despite the fact that their machinery was not in use at the time.¹⁶ LPG Type III

¹⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-042 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 7.12.1965 p.2 and p.160.

¹⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-043 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 7.12.1965 Referat Genosse Lüdecke p.2.

¹⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-547 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Führungs- und Leitungstätigkeit...11.11.1965 p.41.

farmers resented having to adopt struggling LPG Type Is which appeared to be paying the price now for the ('selfish') refusal to develop their production facilities in the past. Certainly there was no desire to put one's own LPG in financial jeopardy for the sake of another. On occasion chairmen of LPG Type IIIs were known thus to refuse proposals from the KLR that they cooperate with farmers from the LPG Type I at the very least unless they could demonstrate the ability to achieve parity in their yields.¹⁷

In 1965 there was some evidence of successful cooperation between several LPGs based around the small town of Trebra, *Kreis* Sondershausen. The SED *Kreisleitung* reported that there had been sufficient prior discussion among leading local cadres – party secretaries as well as LPG chairmen – to enable machinery to be shared between the LPGs. The *Kreisleitung's* Secretary for Agriculture made clear above all that the key to success had been sufficient preparation of farmers beforehand. In his words: "LPG farmers prefer not to slip into a finished corset".¹⁸ It was clear however that at this stage LPG farmers of all types along with their leading cadres on the whole were not convinced that they were not going to be stitched up – be it in a corset of either their own making or someone else's.¹⁹

In 1965 LPG Type Is still outnumbered LPG Type IIIs in the *Bezirk*. Of 651 LPG Type Is 122 were less than 100 hectares in size and a further 350 less than 300 hectares in size.²⁰ Cooperation was thus put forward as the key to rationalising production while maintaining the rights of the individual farmer, just as collectivisation had been. However, just as they had with collectivisation many farmers regarded this as yet another restriction on their independence. In contrast to the spring of 1960 however establishing cooperation by force was deemed by the SED leadership to be worth neither the risk of damage to production nor the social discord in the countryside which it would inevitably produce. Rather the transmission of SED agricultural policy relied heavily on the willingness and ability of LPG functionaries to explain it and persuade LPG members of its value to them as well as to the society at large. It became clear however that LPG functionaries remained

¹⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-588 Bezirksvorstandes der DBD, Bericht über die Entwicklung von Kooperationsbeziehungen...25.11.1965 p.23.

¹⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-043 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 7.12.1965 Referat Genosse Dyballa p.160.

¹⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-144 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Abt. Landwirtschaft Vorlage an das Sekretariat, Ergänzung zum Beschluss des Sekretariates der BL Nr.995 vom 16.12.1965 zur Vorbereitung des IX. Deutschen Bauernkongresses. Massnahmeplan pp.39-51.

²⁰ 5 out of 475 LPG Type III were less than 100 hectares and 135 LPG Type III less than 300 hectares in size.

more often than not unconvinced of the benefits of further change to the structure of agriculture and the establishment of cooperation either to themselves, the LPG members or society in general.

The attainment of a reasonable level of profitability in the LPG, which enabled LPG members to receive satisfactory incomes, had brought a degree of social harmony and stability to collective farms not seen since before the collectivisation campaign. There was thus understandable desire on the part of the cadres and ordinary members not to rock the boat with further change. This attitude was critically dismissed in the rhetoric of party sources as “the theory of mediocrity” which derided resistance to further change on such grounds as merely signs of incompetence or cowardice among LPG cadres and ideological backwardness among their members.²¹

After the failure of cooperation during the harvest in 1965, the *Bezirksleitung* certainly regarded LPG cadres as a weak link in the chain of policy implementation in agriculture from the development of cooperation through to the use of material incentive and economic levers as part of the New Economic System:

A whole range of leading cadre in the collectives, chairmen as well as crop and livestock brigadiers are not getting to grips with the current problems of society's development. This is the result of their level of qualification, even though many of them are themselves state qualified farmers or master farmers. This is expressed in their failure to understand the necessity of payment of leading cadres according to overall performance, the necessity of implementing feed sharing according to stocks and market production of livestock, in insufficient rates of capital accumulation and the lagging construction and extension of collective livestock stalls as well as in the insufficient consideration of the issues of cooperative relations... In most cases the functionaries appear to be the progressive party in the collective. But already in the boards of the collective farms these leading cadres often do not find sufficient support in order to realise the tasks in the collectives individually....

Worse still many LPG cadres clearly had no desire to continue in a position where they were under constant pressure to push through policies which the majority of their fellow farmers rejected. The report continued:

²¹ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/5-382 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr.16/65 29.5.1965 pp.181-191.

In all the districts in which new elections are being held there are problems with filling posts as chairmen and board members. They refuse to be candidates using in part paper-thin arguments. They claim not to understand the integrated deployment of machinery and cite among other things internal difficulties in the collectives, health reasons, age, unreasonable state demands for grain delivery, poor support from the board, differences within the LPGs. The real causes lie however not in these arguments but are rather to be found in the fact that these chairmen shy away from confrontations with LPG members over the implementation of the decisions of the party and the government.²²

Given the degree to which LPG of all types, but particularly Type I, were failing to take the steps to develop with the speed the SED leadership desired, doubts were raised as to the competence or indeed the political reliability of the leading cadres of the LPG. It had already been made clear that LPG chairmen who proved flagrantly to be unable or unwilling to establish a functioning collective farm were liable to be labelled opponents of progress and removed from their posts.²³ During the end of year assemblies for 1963, the SED *Kreisleitung* in *Kreis Sömmerda* for example deemed it necessary to ensure that changes were made to the heads of several LPGs, because they had conspicuously failed to impose order on the collective.²⁴ However immediate wholesale changes to those running LPGs which were not rapidly implementing SED policies were neither possible nor worthwhile. Not only was there a lack of suitably qualified, suitably skilled and suitably reliable replacements, but transforming agriculture while retaining some stability in collective farms and winning LPG members' support for the transformation was recognised to be necessarily a gradual process.

In the face of ongoing hostility to cooperation from LPG members and LPG functionaries, administrative attempts were made to move the situation forward in the *Bezirk*. To ensure members of smaller LPGs supported cooperation or merger, the head of the BLR made it clear at the end of 1965 that in future access to new machinery would be predicated on the development of effective cooperative relations. LPG Type Is with less

²² ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-565 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzungen über die Vorbereitungen der Neuwahlen bzw. Ergänzungswahlen in den Genossenschaften des Bezirkes Erfurt. 10.12.1965 pp.206-209.

²³ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/3-278 SED Kreisleitung Nordhausen, Bericht über die Lage und die eingeleitete Massnahmen zur Veränderung und Verbesserung der genossenschaftlichen Arbeit in der LPG Typ III "Rotes Banner" Ellrich, 31.7.1963 pp.2-8.

²⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/092 KLR – Produktionsleitung, Einschätzung der durchgeführten Jahresendversammlungen und Analyse der Entwicklung der LPG im Jahre 1963. 19.2.1964 pp.2-20.

than 100 hectares would not be able to purchase machinery until they could prove that it would be used to the maximum of its capacity. Similarly no credit would be given to enable the construction of larger sheds for livestock unless LPG Type Is were participating in a cooperative enterprise.²⁵ Reporting in March 1966, the agriculture department in the SED *Bezirksleitung* suggested that in most cases it was relatively clear to the LPG functionaries with whom and how cooperative relations could be set up. The essential problem was that these leading cadres either claimed to find it impossible to gain the support of members or had simply refused to confront them on this issue.²⁶ Particularly in the LPG Type Is in the *Bezirk*, there was a willingness to resist cooperation in practice and a continuing suspicion of the regime's motives in insisting upon it. In *Kreis* Worbis, the SED *Kreisleitung* reported a range of arguments widely raised against those state and party officials advocating cooperation between LPGs in the district: "we don't need cooperative relations for machinery; we'll carry out our own work alone, we've got enough tractors and horses....you want to take away from us our right to use the machinery we bought ourselves." It was clear too that there was a fundamental hostility to the state's repeated attempts to interfere in the running of the collective farms. LPG Type I members in *Kreis* Worbis responded to SED *Kreisleitung* functionaries with comments such as: "Why don't you leave the LPGs in peace? You've always got something new".²⁷ However during 1966 LPG chairmen were put under increased pressure by the KLR to sign their LPGs up to participation in a KOG and commit their machinery to cooperate in crop production during that year's harvest, regardless of the attitudes of the collective farmers themselves.²⁸

By August 1966, at least on paper, the development of cooperation appeared to have advanced with all but 20 of the *Bezirk's* 1062 LPGs apparently signed up to participation in a cooperative community (KOG) with other LPGs. The KLR's administrative success in this regard however again failed to match up with the actual practice of the LPGs

²⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/2-043 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 7.12.1965 Referat Referat Genosse Kummer p.131.

²⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/097 Abt. Parteiorgane an die Bezirksleitung, Ergänzung zur Kreisanalyse über die Kampfkraft der Partei laut Fernschreiben Nr.26 vom 15.1.1966, 19.1.1966 pp.41-54.

²⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-159 SED Kreisleitung Worbis, Bericht über die Führung der polit-ideologischen Arbeit...3.6.1966 p.29.

²⁸ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.023/147 Material über Erfahrungen der Parteiarbeit im Bezirk Erfurt zur Lösung der ideologischen Fragen bei der Entwicklung von Kooperationsbeziehungen in der sozialistischen Landwirtschaft 4.5.1966; ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-150 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Entwurf des Berichtes an das Sekretariat des ZK über "Die Erfahrungen der Parteiarbeit speziell zur Lösung der ideologischen Fragen bei der Entwicklung von Kooperationsbeziehungen". pp.37-55.

during the harvest. Rather as during the collectivisation, it was one thing to gain agreement in theory, it was quite another to see to a policy's implementation in practice. In this respect, LPG chairmen remained as clearly beholden to their members' opinions when it came to carrying out the harvest, as they were, at least outwardly, to conform to the demands of the KLRs. Thus in much of the *Bezirk* harvest machinery was reported to have been used with only the minimum lip-service paid to the notion of cooperation between LPGs. Until strict agreements had been reached between LPG chairmen and ratified in a vote of the respective members' assemblies of the LPGs, it was argued that cooperative use of machinery could only occur under the terms of 'socialist aid' and hence not in a coordinated deployment, as the KLR might have wished.²⁹ Even where tentative agreements had been made, LPG Type I chairmen tended, as they had the previous year, to withdraw their machinery and return to working independently after only a matter of days.³⁰ In *Kreis* Worbis the development of cooperation had been outwardly successful with the inclusion of all the LPGs in the district in one or another KOG. In practice individual LPGs resisted using their machinery in cooperation with one another reaching agreements only on temporary exchanges of machinery.³¹

At this stage it was clear that few LPG chairmen were either willing or able to begin more than superficial cooperation during the harvest. Collective farmers, if not LPG chairmen themselves, had by this stage not been sufficiently persuaded of the value to them of cooperating with their neighbours in crop production. Until they could be persuaded, the KLRs were forced to accept that cooperative relations would not develop with any degree of consistency or comprehensiveness. The balance of interests which defined the organisation of agriculture remained heavily influenced by farmers' concern to protect their rights of ownership and the independence of local decision making, against the SED leadership's project of industrialising production and rationalising administrative control over LPGs and rural communities at large.

²⁹ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-159 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Stellungnahme zum Massnahmeplan des Rates des Bezirks...13.6.1966 p.132.

³⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-169 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Informationsbericht Nr19/66 24.8.1966 p.31; IV/A/2/3-169 Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung des Standes des soz. Bewusstseins der Bevölkerung unseres Bezirkes...8.9.1966 p.79.

³¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-159 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Agit./Prop, Stellungnahme der Bezirksleitung zur Berichterstattung des Sekretariats der SED Kreisleitung Worbis, 13.6.1966 p.28.

Competing Interests and the Obstacles to Persuasion

During 1967 and 1968 the SED leadership in the *Bezirk* sought to make more rapid strides towards the development of advanced cooperative relations between LPGs in crop production and the implementation of a set of financial controls in the LPGs which would make them more responsive to incentive-based economic planning. The extent to which this was achieved continued however to be hampered by the insufficient reliability of LPG functionaries and the inadequacy of the network of regime supporters at the grassroots – primarily in the SED party organisations but also in the DBD.

In the mid 1960s there were simply not enough LPG leaders who could be relied upon to advocate cooperation to their members and to cooperate successfully with their neighbours, being themselves neither convinced of the logic of such measures agriculturally nor indeed supportive of any steps which appeared to compromise their own personal authority. How far LPG chairmen's attitudes towards cooperation conformed to those of the SED leadership depended in large part on how beneficial to them and to their LPG it might prove to be. It was also dependent on how strongly they were influenced as well as supported by the SED party organisation in the LPG. As far as cooperation was concerned however, LPG chairmen and even SED party organisations in the LPG, let alone the rank and file collective farmers found that they had good reason to be sceptical of the benefit to them of the policy in practice, if not in theory. In the rhetoric of the administration's documents, "*Betriebsegoismus*" ("Enterprise Egotism") was seen to be at the root of the failure of cooperation.³²

With regard to the LPG, as a phrase "*Betriebsegoismus*" covered a multitude of apparent sins against the spirit if not always the letter of SED agricultural policy. Essentially it was used to describe any behaviour or act undertaken by LPG chairmen which was considered to be purely in the interests of the success of their own collective farm and consequently to the cost of others. Although it was clearly used as a label to criticise the behaviour of LPG functionaries who were not wholehearted in their support for cooperation on the terms proposed to them, it did identify a real obstacle to successful conduct of cooperative relations between LPGs. Regardless of political loyalties,

³² e.g. ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-161 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft Handmaterial zur Berichterstattung des Sekretariats der SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda vor dem Sekretariat in der Land- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft 7.5.1968 p.57 for a dramatic representation of such conflicts of interest see: Sakowski H., *Daniel Druskat*, (E. Berlin, 1976).

collective farmers were openly hostile to any measures which threatened to compromise their incomes or their independence and were capable of bringing pressure to bear on their leading functionaries to prevent their implementation. How well these cadres worked together was crucial to the success of cooperation. However there were considerable obstacles to a harmonious relationship between LPG chairmen. Not only did they have their own individual concerns not to be seen to be outdone, the scorn they could face from their constituent collective farmers if thought to have failed to act in their best interests could make their position untenable.

Within the LPG and the KOG Walschleben, *Kreis* Erfurt-Land, clashes of personalities became a serious problem between 1965 and 1967. At one point members of the LPG Type III Gebesee were reportedly openly opposed to continuing with cooperative relations with their neighbours, accusing their chairman of being so subservient that he was little more than “the coach driver” of the chairman of the LPG Type III Walschleben.³³ During a discussion in Heringen, *Kreis* Nordhausen over the future of cooperation between LPG in the area in April 1967, the chairman of the LPG Type III in Urbach pointed out how difficult it was for chairmen of the LPG Type Is to persuade their members: “Our colleagues in the LPGs Types I and II, the chairmen and board members who are concerned to participate [in the KOG] are still subject to serious attacks. The development, which would have been reckoned good thus far, reached its high point with an almost catastrophic collapse. The chairman of the LPG Type II was heavily criticised by his members who accused him of wanting to throw everything away; they had given him the title “the red general” and said that he was selling the LPG out...”³⁴ Under such pressures, cooperative relations tended to break down. Thus it was that a working group from the *Bezirksleitung* monitoring the harvest in 1967 in *Kreis* Apolda found a number of LPGs refusing to allow their harvesters to be used in combination with those of other LPGs. One LPG chairman reportedly defended his actions on the basis that he could not afford not to look after his own farm’s interests first: “last year we were conned by the integrated

³³ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-550 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane Erfahrungen und Schlussfolgerungen...3.11.1965 p.100; BIV/2/5-384 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Information 27.9.1966 p.256-258; BIV/2/7-588 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung des Kooperationsbereiches Walschleben 6.7.1966, p.145-154; SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Abt. Parteiorgane, Faktenmaterial zu einigen Problemen der Partei und Massenarbeit der PO der Kooperationsgemeinschaft Walschleben. 23.11.1966 pp.174-177.

³⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-588 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Protokoll über den Erfahrungsaustausch am 28.3.1967 in Heringen. 11.4.1967 pp.320-348.

deployment of machinery. We gave up our harvesters when the weather was good and then all we received was wet grain.”³⁵

Part of the opposition to cooperative relations from even among those who were ordinarily supportive of the regime’s goals for industrialising and modernising agricultural production was the result of divergent opinions on the means to achieve these goals. Applying fertiliser and pesticides, improving the quality of the soil through drainage or irrigation and raising the efficiency of the production process through the use of machinery appeared to be most cost-effective on a large scale. How this scale might best be achieved remained a matter of some dispute in farming circles. There had long been strong tendencies among LPG functionaries to seek to create large self-contained mixed arable and livestock farms – so-called Grand LPGs³⁶ - , which nevertheless could operate using the latest technologies and scientific theories to increase productivity, while overseeing the balanced development of both strands of production.³⁷ The essential argument in favour of Grand LPGs was the importance of maintaining the traditional direct relationship between feed production, livestock and organic fertiliser under one administration. Adherence to this traditional principle did not however tally with the principles of a progressive industrialising agricultural policy which sought to dispense with traditional approaches to farming.

From a production perspective, maintaining mixed farms on this scale threatened to put unnecessary limits on the extent of specialisation of production possible. Agricultural production had to be responsive to the demands of the economy as a whole and had to develop accordingly. As part of a wider complex economic system, the potential for increasing production through intensive specialisation where possible took precedence over maintaining what appeared to be simplistic and outdated notions of the interdependence of crop and livestock farming. Additionally the Grand LPGs gave too much power to the individual chairmen who ran these giants and created a degree of bureaucracy and administrative complexity internal to the LPG which made them not only

³⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-557 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft der Bezirksleitung, Bericht über den Einsatz im Kreis Apolda, 9.8.1967 p.72-76; IV/A/4.10/077 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der MV 10.9.1967 p.50-57, 5.10.1967 p.58-63 27.11.1967 pp.74-81.

³⁶ Grand LPG serves here as a translation for the term “*Gross-LPG*”.

³⁷ Examples of LPG members opinions to this effect may be found in ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/2-022 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung zu den Fragen und Aufgaben der soz. Landwirtschaft am 7.3.1968 Beitrag Genossin Zessin p.103; SED BPA IV/B/2/13-378 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung über das Einwohnerforum in der Grenzgemeinde Berka/Werra Kr. Eisenach 27.1.1969 p.1.

difficult to run efficiently but limited the extent to which their practices could be scrutinised by the state. In their size, they also bore the stigma for LPG members of the Soviet Kolkhoz, in which farmers – according to popular perceptions borne in part no doubt out of Nazi propaganda as well as the actual experiences of German POWs - were deprived of an individual status and condemned ultimately to work as farm labourers ruled by office-bound apparatchiks. However as an approach to developing autarkic production in the GDR, it appeared to offer a happy compromise for some LPG functionaries between modern practices and scale on the one hand and traditional farm organisation and local identity on the other. It also made redundant any complex cooperative agreements between neighbouring LPGs and appeared to avoid the traps of suspicion and conflict which went with cooperation, either in crop production or in the construction of cooperative livestock facilities. Moreover as more LPG Type I members were persuaded to relieve themselves of the burdens of private livestock production by joining the LPG Type IIIs, merger rather than cooperation appeared to be a more successful approach to reaching an expanded yet sustainable scale of agriculture.

During the late 1960s, economic pressures and an ageing workforce were beginning to have an effect on the ability of the LPG Type Is to maintain their independence. A stagnation in the level of production had already begun to take place since 1967, with percentage increases in production in a number of upland districts, where LPG Type Is predominated, growing at a slower rate than the *Bezirk* average. The extreme age of many members of the LPGs Types I and II whose children could not be kept in the LPGs and who were unwilling or unable to continue to farm naturally limited the quantity of produce which they made available to the state. In the past the burden of work on individual members had been kept down by transferring animals from private holdings to collective holdings in sheds which had been extended for the purpose as it became necessary. However without extensive investment in modern livestock sheds, the potential options for accommodating animals with the workforce and the buildings available were becoming increasingly limited in the Type Is. Given bottlenecks in the supply of materials and a general lack of funds to invest in a suitably extensive programme of construction in the upland districts of the *Bezirk*, those members of LPG Type Is who were not seeking to

retire found themselves forced to petition to join the LPG Type IIIs in order to sustain an adequate income.

LPG Type IIIs did not necessarily respond to the plight of their neighbours with great sympathy. Previous conflicts and rivalries between neighbouring LPGs of different types as well as the high incomes of many Type I farmers over previous years tempered the willingness on the part of Type III farmers to help. At the very least this manifested itself in tough conditions for merger set by LPG Type IIIs who were often only willing to take over whole LPGs rather than accepting merely those farmers who were unable to keep their own private livestock any longer. Mergers inevitably took place without the consent of all members of the LPG Type Is. Disgruntlement among former LPG Type I farmers following merger into an LPG Type III could indeed be serious enough to make clear to the Ministry for State Security the need for the recruitment of informants to give regular reports on the situation.³⁸ The compromise position of allowing some farmers to maintain extensive private livestock despite having become members of the LPG Type III was one method of easing the immediate burden of merger on both parties. However in *Bezirk* Erfurt in 1968 the practice appeared to be largely limited to LPGs in *Kreis* Eisenach with only odd examples thus far in other districts.³⁹

In some LPG Type I the resolve to resist merger among the members hardened and farmers echoed their comments during the original collectivisation campaign, insisting “as long as it’s still possible, we continue as we are”.⁴⁰ For more LPG Type I than ever before in 1968, merger with LPG Type III was however unavoidable. Of the 517 LPG Type I in existence in *Bezirk* Erfurt in September 1967, only 289 existed in 1969.

The expansion of the proportion of agricultural land which was farmed under the statute of LPG Type III and the reduction of the extent of private livestock farming to the benefit of collective livestock holdings certainly aided the evolution of the SED leadership’s general policy of transformation of agriculture and rural society. The incorporation of more pasture and arable land, machinery and buildings and above all financial resources certainly enabled the development of production on a grander scale.

³⁸ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, 1584/84 Kreisdienststelle Erfurt, Werbung des IMS “Max” 2.7.1967 p.23.

³⁹ ThHStAW RdB L014542 Rat für Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Analyse über den Anfall von Altersbetrieben in den LPG des Typ I und II in den nächsten Jahren und Vorschläge von Massnahmen zum Auffangen der Produktion 1969.

⁴⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-161 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Wocheninformation zu einigen Problemen der Führungstätigkeit des Sekretariats der SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, 26.3.1968 p.24.

More importantly the incorporation of LPG Type Is into LPG Type IIIs promised to enable the communication of agricultural policy to collective farmers in a more comprehensive and consistent manner. The pockets of hostility to change which LPG Type Is so clearly represented during the earlier 1960s were increasingly subsumed in the LPG Type IIIs. Recalcitrant leaders of the LPG Type I were no longer in a position to delay changes to the structure or practices of farming in their local area and the members in general who were hostile to agricultural transformation could no longer necessarily expect to win a majority of votes during members' assemblies. Nevertheless the expansion in size of LPG Type IIIs did not necessarily make them entirely pliant to the demands of the KLRs for agricultural development. Indeed in some respects the growth in power of single LPGs as economic units, enabled the LPG leadership to seek to run agriculture more on their own terms rather than those proposed by the district party and state administration.

LPG Chairmen of large LPG Type IIIs on the plains of *Bezirk* Erfurt maintained thus that cooperation was not necessary for them. By 1967 mergers between LPGs (whether preceded by cooperation or not) had enabled LPG chairmen to expand the size of single collective farms sufficiently to claim to have no need of developing formal cooperative relations with their neighbours. At their current size, chairmen pointed out, the LPGs were easily capable of developing field sizes sufficient to use the machinery currently available to its full capacity. Members of large LPGs in Bad Langensalza thus maintained that they already had developed the conditions for industrial scale farming and had no need of cooperation in order to use their machines efficiently. The size of their fields, they claimed, matched the specifications set by the VIII. German Farmers Congress for the use of the latest machine systems.⁴¹ Similarly in *Kreis* Erfurt Land resistance to cooperation was based on the LPG leaders' confidence in being able to cope without it, with arguments such as: "we have a high level of production, we deliver a lot to the state, why should we introduce something new." Even when the value of cooperation was conceded, there was seen to be no reason why it should be permanent cooperation – rather cooperation for certain major campaigns was suggested instead.⁴²

⁴¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-186 Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung, Thesen für den Bericht der Bezirksleitung an die Bezirksdelegiertenkonferenz p.42.

⁴² ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/3-278 SED Kreisleitung Erfurt-Land an den Genossen Bräutigam, Informationsbericht 14.11.1967 p.389.

Such attitudes showed up however a serious deficit among leading cadres, even in LPG Type IIIs, of obedience to or understanding of the 'correct' path of future development in agriculture in the GDR. More often than not, LPG chairmen appeared more willing to ensure their LPG increased production, than back SED agricultural policy.

The Ideological Deficit in the LPG

The balance in authority between LPG chairmen, the LPG members who sat on the directing board of the collective farm on the one hand and the SED party secretary and the party organisation on the other was crucial to the way in which proposals for significant change in the organisation and structure of the LPG were communicated to and received among the collective farmers. Ideally there was considerable overlap between the members of the SED party organisation and the leading LPG members who made up the LPG board. Equally the chairman of the LPG was ideally also a member of the SED, ensuring that the party organisation took the leading role in shaping the development of the collective farm in line with the latest proposals of the SED leadership.

In practice SED party organisations in the LPGs varied considerably in size and activity and the degree of influence which they sought or were able to exert over the LPG's leaders or indeed the collective farmers in general was often minimal. LPG chairmen, regardless of their party affiliation, were not consistent in their support for the concerns of the party secretary or the party organisation where they appeared to differ from his conception of the interests of the LPG. Moreover the board members of the LPG (the majority of whom were without a party affiliation) often represented a more dominant, influential body of opinion among the members than any party organisation.

SED Party organisations in the farms (*Betriebsparteiorganisationen* or BPOs) appeared too often to be either ineffective or indeed themselves not united in support of SED agricultural policies. The attitudes of SED members on the ground in the individual LPGs also did not always conform to those expected of them by the SED *Kreisleitung*. Where LPG Type IIIs were concerned the unreliability of the SED members and the SED party organisation were particularly apparent on the issue of cooperation. Following discussion of the 11th Session of the ZK of the SED in the BPOs in early 1966, the first steps towards winning over party members to the development of extensive cooperative

relations between LPGs had been taken. In *Kreis Sömmerda*, SED members continued nevertheless not to stand fully behind the implementation of this policy nor indeed where they did, could they make an impact on the prevailing sentiment among the collective farmers in general.⁴³ In early 1966 the SED *Kreisleitung* claimed that the party organisations of 10 LPGs had led initiatives toward establishing cooperative relations and cooperative contracts successfully, resulting in four groups of cooperating LPGs. Nevertheless this was the exception rather than the rule, with SED BPOs where they existed and where they supported cooperation still unable to have much of an impact on LPG chairmen let alone LPG boards, mid-level managers (i.e. work brigade leaders and technical advisors) and collective farmers in general.⁴⁴ In *Kreis Sömmerda* throughout 1967 the SED *Kreisleitung* received reports of discord – even where BPOs were considered to have some influence – between members of the board, the chairmen and the SED party leadership on essential questions of cooperation.⁴⁵

Even in LPG Type IIIs with relatively large party organisations, issues such as cooperation between LPGs still provoked enough opposition to the party line as to render party members powerless in the face of such opposition. In the LPG Type III in Beichlingen for example the *Kreisleitung Sömmerda* claimed in 1968 that: “the influence of the opposing forces goes so far that the class conscious forces of the party organisation are being pushed onto the defensive.”⁴⁶ A general overview of the district farmers’ conferences throughout the GDR in 1968 revealed continuing antipathy towards cooperative relations. Just as had been the case after collectivisation in which individual farmers adopted the trappings but not the actual practices of collective farming, so too now were LPGs found to be cooperating in name alone. KOGs were found to have formed to the extent that a cooperative council had been organised but beyond this no practical action was actually being taken to alter the structure of the farms or the organisation of work. Even where chairmen had gone so far as seemingly to cooperate fully in the farming of the arable land between the constituent LPGs, the reality was not always very far

⁴³ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/077 Sektor Parteiinformation, Informationsbericht laut Arbeitsplan 1.2.1966 p.238.

⁴⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/3-278 SED Kreisleitung Nordhausen an den Genossen Bräutigam, Informationsbericht 16.10.1967 p.317.

⁴⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/077 Abt. Parteiorgane – Sektorparteiinformation, Einschätzung der Mitgliederversammlungen Januar 1.2.1967 pp.3-10; Sektor parteiinformation, Einschätzung der MV im Monat August 10.9.1967 p.56.

⁴⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-161 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Faktenmaterial für die Berichterstattung des Sekretariats der SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda..8.5.1968 p.59.

removed from the practice pre-cooperation. The brigades and crops continued to be organised primarily in accordance with the territorial boundaries of the constituent LPGs.⁴⁷ In *Kreis Sömmerda* in July 1968 attempts to introduce the integrated deployment of harvesters were reportedly rejected by LPG functionaries despite the insistence of the SED BPOs.⁴⁸ The effectiveness of the BPOs of a number of LPG Type IIIs was thus increasingly called into question particularly as regarded making the case for cooperation.⁴⁹

The failure of the SED BPOs to influence LPG cadres with regard to the implementation of economic reforms within the LPGs was also apparent. This was most obvious in the LPG Type Is, where SED party organisations – if they existed at all – tended to be small and where the LPG chairmen and certainly the LPG board members were often not party members. It was also the case however even in a number of LPG Type IIIs, that leading cadres were basically unresponsive to the SED party organisation's proposals to develop their LPGs in accordance with the principles of "*sozialistische Betriebswirtschaft*". In meetings of the SED party organisations in October 1967 in *Kreis Sömmerda* among the reasons cited for their continuing failure to influence the development of their collective farms was the repeated failure of management cadres to speak politically to the work collectives. The chairman of the LPG Type III Griefstedt reportedly continued, for example, to proclaim his opposition to socialist competition as bringing only irritation among members.⁵⁰ Reports on meetings of the BPOs the following month pointed to some success in persuading party members of the value of implementing the NÖS, as a necessary step towards developing industrial production in accordance with the resolutions of the VII. SED Party Congress. However LPG cadres were reported to be continuing to oppose economic reform on the basis that it caused disquiet among members of the LPGs and that the LPGs lacked sufficient numbers of cadres to implement it in any case.⁵¹

⁴⁷ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.023/72 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einige weitere Probleme, die aus den KBK sichtbar werden 8.5.1968.

⁴⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/101 Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der MV – Monat Juli 5.8.1968 p.39.

⁴⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/101 Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der MV – Monat August 30.8.1968 p.50.

⁵⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/077 Abt. Parteiorgane Sektor Parteiinformation, Einschätzung der MV im Monat September 5.10.1967 pp.58-63.

⁵¹ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/077 Abt. Parteiorgane Sektor Parteiinformation, Einschätzung der MV Monat November 27.11.1967 pp.74-81.

The DBD and Voices of Conservatism

While the numbers of SED members in leading positions in the LPGs had increased by 1968, the KLRs and the SED *Kreisleitungen* were still reliant on a considerable proportion of functionaries in the LPGs who had not joined a party or who were members of one or other of the block parties (primarily the DBD) to advocate their agricultural policy. The DBD leadership's role in the collectivisation campaign had long since signalled an end to the DBD's potential to be a political refuge for those with opinions about agriculture in the GDR which diverged radically from those of the SED. However the DBD continued to claim a membership among newly collectivised farmers, particularly among members of the LPG Type Is where the SED struggled to find any support following collectivisation.

In 1963 the DBD leadership formally adopted the party programme of the SED as its own, making thereby a definite statement of its subordinate position in agriculture as in other matters to the SED. After 1963 the DBD hierarchy could thus on the whole be relied upon to speak publicly in favour of SED policy and maintain party discipline within its ranks. However DBD members did not automatically become nearly as accepting of the SED's claim to know best how to develop agriculture. An assessment by the SED Central Committee of the ideological situation in the DBD prior to the elections to the *Volkskammer* (National Parliament) in 1963 noted that there were signs of dissent among DBD members throughout the country at their party leadership's apparent capitulation. Wherever local groups of the DBD had a large membership, resistance to accepting the SED's leading role in agriculture remained strong. Arguments were reported to be prevalent among DBD members such as: "the SED should decide things among workers and in industry and the DBD should do so in the countryside." DBD members who were members of LPG Type Is certainly did not appear as a result of the DBD's new status to have developed any less suspicion for aspects of SED policy which appeared to put them at a financial disadvantage. Many DBD members clearly continued to have little regard for SED agricultural policy or indeed for SED functionaries' ability to decide agricultural matters correctly.⁵² Such attitudes persisted into the late 1960s.⁵³

⁵² SAPMO B-Arch DY30/IV A 2/15/103 ZK der SED, Abt. Befreundete Organisationen, Die ideologische Situation in der DBD vor den Volkskammerwahlen 1963.

Despite the proclaimed loyalty of the DBD to the SED agenda, at the grassroots members of the DBD often claimed greater technical expertise and were willing to criticise any proposals which they considered impractical.⁵⁴ Some DBD functionaries recast the old debate of received farming wisdom and traditional practice versus the SED's progressive agricultural policy as practical conservatism in the LPG versus change for change's sake. With the LPG Type III Neuholland held up as a national model for the introduction of socialist business economics in LPGs, many mid-level cadres in the LPGs who had joined the DBD explained their reluctance to introducing similar measures themselves by emphasising the differences between this model LPG and their own situation. "We lack the qualified staff to do the office work" they protested; "We don't have the sort of support from academics like they do in Neuholland". Alternatively they pointed out, with the sort of (justified) self satisfaction which infuriated the district functionaries of the SED, "We fulfil our plans even without Neuholland's methods".⁵⁵ The so-called 'green comrades' (*Grüne Genossen*) of the DBD were thus regularly criticised for their lack of support for the evolution of socialist agricultural policy, for the sake of their own LPG's interests.

In March 1968 speakers at the SED *Bezirksparteiaktivtagung* reviewed the causes of the failure of LPG cadres to adopt the economic reforms required of them. Mid- and top-level cadres had according to the SED *Bezirkleitung*'s agricultural secretary failed to grasp the "systematic character" of the NÖS. The financial organisation of LPGs had to be transformed in order for agriculture to be integrated efficiently into the wider reformed economy. Agriculture was to be seen as a part of a wider system which created flexible responsive links between aspects of agricultural production and other interrelated sectors of the economy. It had thus too to develop appropriate corresponding forms of financial organisation as defined by socialist business economics. The fact that economic reform had not been fully achieved appeared therefore to be in large part down to the failure of LPG cadres to see the value or necessity of this project of economic integration.

⁵³ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/IV A 2/15 - 103 ZK der SED, Abt. Befreundete Organisationen Sekretariat des Parteivorstandes der DBD, Analyse über die Entwicklung der Leitungstätigkeit der Vorstände und des sozialistischen Bewusstsein der Mitglieder seit unserem VII. Parteitag, 23.2.1968.

⁵⁴ for example ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/9.02-289 SED Kreisleitung Eisenach, Fernschreiben, Information über die Gemeinde Dippach..14.8.1968 p.48

⁵⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-410 SED Kreisleitung Eisenach an die Bezirksleitung der SED, Einschätzung über die Kreisdelegiertenkonferenz der DBD am 12.1.1968 in Eisenach 1.2.1968 p.42

More than half of LPG chairmen in the *Bezirk* had taken part in courses over several weeks during the winter months between 1967 and 1968 to help them comprehend both the long-term goals behind the economic reforms as well as the best strategies for their actual implementation. Nevertheless in the *Bezirk* as a whole only 75 LPGs had actually introduced the reforms comprehensively.⁵⁶ In *Kreis* Weimar 6 LPG chairmen were named and shamed at the District Farmers' Conference in April 1968 for having done nothing to implement socialist business economics. Rather more had failed to implement one or other of the essential reforms required of them. The continuing failure of these cadres to take action in their LPGs smacked therefore of either a lack of ability or a lack of reliability. Either, it was suggested, they did not understand the issues involved or they were afraid of confronting old traditions and ideas about farming.⁵⁷ Either way it was apparent that there was a deficit in the extent to which LPG chairmen sought actively to implement change, responding in part to the concerns of their members.

Uncertainty and the Limits of Transformation

At the heart of the reticence of farmers and functionaries within LPGs of all types to accept cooperation or the economic reforms was a lack of confidence in the positive effect of further change. There was no doubt that the development of cooperation raised numerous fundamental existential questions. Many women farmers feared that they would not be given work in their own village once cooperation was underway. The loss of flexible working hours and proximity to the household and children represented a considerable upheaval in the lifestyles of women in rural communities, which were not necessarily thought to be positive.⁵⁸ Men also had their doubts about going to work away from their local area as a result of cooperation. Nor were they particularly confident of having to work alongside strangers. A number of tractor drivers were found to doubt whether the other drivers they worked with would be as diligent as them. More generally the fear of loss of earnings or financial insolvency as a result of having to cooperate was

⁵⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/2-022 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung zu den Fragen und Aufgaben der soz. Landwirtschaft 7.3.1968 Referat des Genossen Lüdecke p.3

⁵⁷ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.023/220 Protokoll der Kreisbauernkonferenz Weimar am 18 und 19.4.1968, Referat Gen. Schöffler, Produktionsleiter und Vorsitzender des Kreislandwirtschaftsrat.

⁵⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA IVB/2/5-165 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Information über einige Probleme aus der operativen Tätigkeit 23.7.1968 p.112

paramount.⁵⁹ In July 1968 mid-level cadres in the LPGs were reported too to be in fear of losing their positions as a result of cooperation. Ordinary farmers, among them SED members, predicted it would be their “doom”.⁶⁰

The arguments against socialist business economics reportedly given by mid- and top-level cadres in LPGs tended to see reforms as too much extra work and hardly worth introducing as a passing fad.⁶¹ The differing genesis of LPGs in the course of the 10 to 15 years since collectivisation had begun to occur, left neighbouring farms with fundamentally similar potential for production at vastly different stages of development and different degrees of financial security looking forward to an uncertain future. Given these differences in past development, collective farmers could have very different conceptions of how their best interests were to be served. There is no doubt that many LPG Type IIIs benefited from leading the way in economic reform, gaining in status as well as material reward. On the other hand, successful LPGs were understandably loth to alter what appeared to be a well-functioning organisation. Equally the members of struggling LPGs were not always open to the latest measures, fearing further reductions in their incomes or still less control over their farm as a result. The problems faced by state functionaries suggesting alterations to farmers’ ways of working over the last 10 years were well summed up by a former functionary in the state agricultural apparatus: “How often have I personally had to hear in the 13 years of my employment in the State apparatus as I gave good advice in the farms: it’s all right for you to talk, you get good money anyway.”⁶² As long as LPG members and LPG functionaries were uncertain what economic reform entailed for their future prosperity as stakeholders in their LPG, they remained un-persuaded of the value of change.

In practice however giving security to the LPGs with regard to their future development was not easily achieved. The beginnings of an economic meltdown in the economy at large in 1968 undermined the validity of long-term economic planning. Not for the first time and certainly not the last, LPG members complained that they were being

⁵⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/197 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreisbauernkonferenz am 3. und 4. Mai 1968 Diskussionsbeitrag Otto Köhler, Kleinhausen Typ I pp.158-165.

⁶⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IVB/2/5-165 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Information zu Führungsproblemen der Sekretariate der Kreisleitungen...16.7.1968 p.105.

⁶¹ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.023/220 Protokoll der Kreisbauernkonferenz Weimar am 18 und 19.4.1968, Diskussionsbeitrag Helmut Seidel, Vorsitzender LPG Typ II Saalborn.

⁶² ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/197 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreisbauernkonferenz am 3. und 4. Mai 1968 Diskussionsbeitrag Walter Schreck, KOG Frömmstedt pp.144-150.

made to bear the brunt of an increase in prices for the sake of industry. Despite the supposed existence of buffers which reduced some of the prices charged LPGs for essential products from industry, there appeared to have been a systematic increase across the board for the machines, equipment and materials required for LPGs to develop industrial-scale production. Any savings on costs as a result of a reduction in manpower were reportedly being outweighed by excess costs for material and machinery.⁶³

A report by the Agricultural Council of the GDR in March 1968 on the mood in the LPGs pointed to a number of perceived injustices raising anger among farmers around the country. LPG chairmen found that they were unable to meet the rising costs of production with the income from the sale of their produce. In other words industrial prices appeared to be rising faster than the prices and bonuses paid for increased deliveries of agricultural produce. On top of this farmers complained they were not even getting value for money. Despite the raised prices there appeared to be no guarantee of availability as far as the provision of machinery and tools was concerned. Any long-term planning or contractual supply even for the coming year was out of the question. Just to add insult to injury some of the machines with which farmers had been supplied were found too to be faulty.⁶⁴

The degree of concern among collective farmers over their future status in agriculture was highlighted by discussion of the new national constitution to be introduced in 1968. Article 13 of the proposed constitution appeared to describe the products produced by collective farming of the soil as consequently collective property. Given that livestock owned privately by Type I farmers relied on the crops farmed collectively, some LPG members in *Bezirk* Erfurt reportedly expressed fears that the produce from their individual livestock farming could now be construed as collective property. More seriously farmers in general voiced questions as to whether the development of cooperation between LPG particularly in crop production signalled the end to the distinction between collective use, yet private ownership of land – a de facto expropriation of farmers.⁶⁵

For LPG Type IIIs which had struggled for years to achieve better results without success, there was too a good deal of scepticism towards making changes without a clear

⁶³ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.023/72 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einige weitere Probleme, die aus den KBK sichtbar werden 8.5.1968.

⁶⁴ B-Arch Abt. DDR, DK 1 VA Neu 2846 Landwirtschaftsrat der DDR, Information zum Verlauf der Frühjahrsbestellung sowie Kritiken, Hinweise und Anfragen 22.3.1968.

⁶⁵ B-Arch Abt. DDR, DK 1 VA Neu 2846 Landwirtschaftsrat der DDR, Information zu einigen Problemen der Verfassungsdiskussion in den sozialistischen Betrieben der Landwirtschaft 1.3.1968.

prospect for the long-term future. In the LPG Type III in Buttstädt for example farmers responded to attempts to interest them in discussion of the upcoming national referendum on the constitution with a straightforward refusal, unless somebody came to give them a clear indication of how they were to be helped to develop: “first there must be clarity about our future, then we’ll talk about other problems”.⁶⁶

Conclusion

By 1968 much had been changed already in socialist agriculture. The number of LPG Type Is had been reduced to less than the number of LPG Type IIIs in most of the districts of the *Bezirk*. As the size of the agricultural workforce had declined, levels of qualification had risen significantly [see Figure 3]. The percentage of LPG members in Bezirk Erfurt who belonged to the SED rose too from a paltry 6.9% in 1962⁶⁷ to 14.2% in 1968.⁶⁸

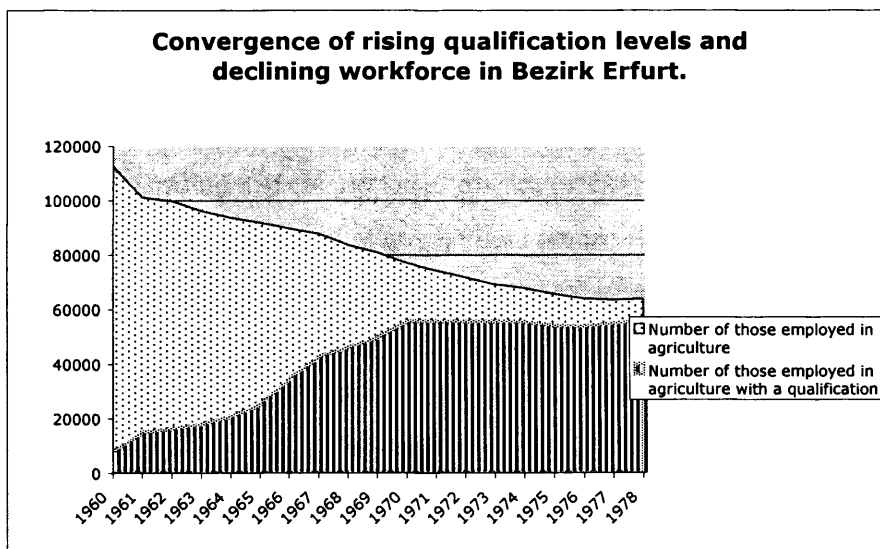


Figure 3.⁶⁹

Much too had been achieved in establishing the conditions for mechanised production on a large-scale, with mergers and some forms of cooperation taking effect. Despite resistance to the NÖS, in many LPGs performance-related pay, bonuses and detailed

⁶⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-161 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Ergänzung zu Problemen der Führungstätigkeit im Kr. Sömmerda, 15.4.1968 p.33.

⁶⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3 – 186 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Analyse der Mitgliederbewegung im Jahre 1966 9.1.1967 pp.142-163.

⁶⁸ SAPMO B-Arch DY 30/1794 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Anzahl der Mitglieder und Kandidaten der Partei zu den Gesamtmitgliedern in den LPG Typ I, II und III 1969 p.44.

⁶⁹ *Statistische Jahrbücher, Bezirk Erfurt 1960-1979* (Erfurt 1961-1980). By 1968 the proportion of the agricultural workforce with the basic qualification Facharbeiterprüfung was at 47%. The proportion of those qualified as Master farmers, or with a technical college or university qualification was at 7.8%. *Statistisches Jahrbuch, Bezirk Erfurt 1970/I* (Erfurt 1971) p.126.

accounting of costs and profits were an accepted part of the production process. The trappings of collective democracy – meetings of LPG commissions, weekly board meetings, plenary members' assemblies and particularly brigade assemblies - had to some extent become a routine part of the functioning of the LPGs, essential to the sharing of information and the transmission of authority within the collective farm. There had however by no means been uniform progress across all the districts of the *Bezirk* in the development of cooperative relations, the implementation of economic reform or indeed the improvement of productivity. There were still a number of struggling LPG Type IIIs and LPG Type Is whose members despaired of the future, particularly in the uplands in the north and west of the *Bezirk*. Moreover the evolution of working conditions in livestock production was still very differentiated between LPGs.⁷⁰

A survey of opinion by the institute for research into popular opinion among farmers in a number of LPGs from each of the *Bezirke* in the GDR in 1967 illustrated clear limits to the extent to which collectivised farming had been embraced by a considerable proportion of farmers. Although technological improvements were broadly welcomed, collective farming had clearly failed to convince many farmers that they were in a better position than they had been as private land owners. Only 5.5% of respondents from the LPG Oberreissen in *Bezirk* Erfurt agreed that they enjoyed their work more today in the LPG than they had prior to collectivisation. Most respondents in all 4 LPGs surveyed in *Bezirk* Erfurt, as well as in the average for the GDR as a whole, agreed with the statement that work gave them as much pleasure today as it did before. Very few respondents valued the work organisation in their LPG or regarded personal income as a benefit of collectivisation – in the rest of the GDR as in *Bezirk* Erfurt fewer than half of the respondents recognised any other benefits than improved access to modern machinery.⁷¹

Nevertheless identification with the LPG appears also to have grown among all farmers, not least perhaps given the futility of continuing to hark back to the days of private farming. While concessions continued to be made to farmers in the form of household plots and livestock, working conditions had changed considerably, with many (although not all) residual elements of private farming replaced with a collective working

⁷⁰ for example ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/9.01-289 SED Kreisleitung Erfurt-Land, Gruppensprache mit Mitgliedern der Viehwirtschaftsbrigade, Kerspleben 1.11.1968 p.79.

⁷¹ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.023/82 Genosse Norden an Grüneberg, Material des Instituts für Meinungsforschung über einige Probleme der sozialistischen Landwirtschaft 24.4.1967.

culture.⁷² As a woman farmer in the LPG Bachra, *Kreis Sömmerda* described at a district farmers' conference in May 1968: "the brigade members do not just produce together, they spend a part of their spare time in the work collective. Group trips, events and discussion are a fixed part of life in the Brigade..."⁷³ At the same conference a member of the LPG Schillingstedt offered his conception of the transformation over the last 10 years. 10 years ago "that was still my field and my animal and it became only later gradually our field and our animal and today it is a matter of course that every individual thinks collectively."⁷⁴ Of course this sentiment was not shared by all collective farmers, nonetheless it seems that increasingly the LPG did provide formerly private farmers with a new sense of identity. Shortly before the VIII. SED Party Congress, a survey was carried out by the Institute for Social Sciences at the ZK. Asked whether they felt personally connected with their LPG 81.4% of the 2462 respondents to this question agreed. When questioned as to the main changes which they considered to have taken place among the people during the development of the LPG far and away the most popular answer was the level of qualification. Second highest was the "development of comradely collaboration and mutual aid between colleagues".⁷⁵ Some of the essential changes associated with the development of agriculture such as technical education and collective work practices appeared thus to have had an impact on the way farmers perceived themselves.

It was certainly true that by this stage SED party organisations had made significant strides not only in the quantity but also in the quality of their members in the farming community in the *Bezirk*. Technical training had also gone hand in hand with political conformity. The positive benefits of collective farming had begun to become visible and more and more farmers were being incorporated through technical training and qualification into a socialist system of modern agriculture which promoted cooperation. Nevertheless considerable persuasion was required still to win over even loyal leading functionaries in the LPGs, let alone sceptical mid-level cadres and the majority of rank

⁷² Private home production (individuelle Hauswirtschaften) remained central to life as a collective farmer and was a crucial means of supplementing income for farmers. It came also to be essential to the production of certain items of produce for the GDR as a whole from the late 1970s. See for an example of the meaning of the individuelle Hauswirtschaft to members of an LPG, B. Schier, *Alltagsleben im 'Sozialistischen Dorf'* (Munich 2001) pp.223-237.

⁷³ ThHStAW SED BPA – Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/197 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreisbauernkonferenz am 3. und 4. Mai 1968 Diskussionsbeitrag Kollegin Krempel – LPG Bachra p.184.

⁷⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/197 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreisbauernkonferenz am 3. und 4. Mai 1968 Diskussionsbeitrag Koll. Tettenborn, LPG Schillingstedt p.187.

⁷⁵ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.023/83 Institut für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK der SED, Lehrstuhl marxistisch-leninistische Soziologie, Einschätzung und Wertung der Beantwortung der Fragen 1-21 und der Rangfolge der Vorgaben in diesen Fragen (nach ihrer Häufigkeit) aus der schriftlichen Befragung der Genossenschaftsbauern...17.2.1971.

and file collective farmers, to the next steps in the development of agriculture. Fear of future expropriation and redundancy, loss of independence and subordinate status loomed large in farmers' responses to the rate at which change was supposed to occur in agriculture. The mechanisation, specialisation and concentration of production on an industrial scale promised exciting and dramatic improvements in productivity as well as working and living conditions in rural communities. However such developments also cast doubt over the future status and security of work in agriculture and life in the village for all members of the collective farms.

CHAPTER 6

Critical Transitions

“From 1969 we’ll carry out crop production in common with the LPG Type III....What do you want from us now, we produce well. We have a high production; we have what we need and we’re doing fine...”¹ (LPG Type I members in Burgtonna, *Kreis* Bad Langensalza make clear their lack of enthusiasm for developing advanced cooperation in crop production, February 1968.)

“The solutions to the issue of cooperation are more difficult or rather more grave than was the formation of the LPG.”² (Comments made by leading agricultural functionaries in discussion in *Kreis* Mühlhausen in October 1968.)

Much had been achieved during the 1960s in transforming agriculture in the GDR and changing the context in which agricultural policy was implemented. More LPG chairmen were technically trained and politically loyal. SED party secretaries and SED party organisations were becoming increasingly influential. An ever increasing proportion of LPG members were achieving qualifications in socialist agricultural methods, learning specialist trades and at more advanced levels, learning the techniques of socialist agricultural management and economics. Moreover with the continuing absorption of LPG Type Is into LPG Type IIIs and the development of collective livestock herds, greater centralisation of farm management increased the uniformity and consistency with which the SED leadership was able to communicate its authority over the front-line of production. Arguably by the end of the 1960s there had been some internalisation of the norms of socialist, collectivised and industrialised agriculture among the agricultural workforce alongside a stabilisation and routinisation of the structures of agricultural administration. These processes of transformation had however by no means been consistent or comprehensive in their scope and rested on fragile foundations.

There remained in 1968 a considerable gulf between the theoretical degree of agriculture’s development in the GDR and the actual extent to which individual LPGs were prepared to evolve. As had been too often demonstrated, there were limits to the speed with which reforms could be imposed on reluctant collective farmers without damaging production and alienating a proportion of the population which was only just

¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/7 – 268 SED Bezirksleitung, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Bericht über die LPG in Burgtonna 29.2.1968 p.123-124, the report describes how a members’ assembly was held in secret in order that a resolution could be passed against cooperation without interference from the village mayor or the chairman of the LPG Type III.

² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/7 – 268 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Information über Aussprachen im KOV Milch- und Molkereierzeugnisse Mühlhausen vom 22.-24.9.1968 unter Leitung des Genossen Semisch, Mitglied des ZK der SED. 1.10.1968 p.79.

beginning literally and metaphorically to come to terms with the regime. There were also limits to the ability of the economy as a whole to provide the investment needed to sustain this speed of transformation. Finally there were limits to the certainty of LPG functionaries as to which path of development was likely to be the most effective means of reaching the ultimate goal of a cost-efficient mechanised, concentrated and industrial-scale agriculture. In 1968 and 1969 some LPGs were indeed marching forward but not all were following the same path. Many LPGs, particularly LPG Type Is, were standing resolutely still, while the vast majority were being jostled and cajoled into more or less reluctant steps toward an uncertain future.

Forced Evolution

Since the late 1950s a considerable amount had been achieved in transforming the living conditions and working practices of villagers and farmers. It remained the case however that the zeal of district state and party agricultural functionaries for transforming the fundamental organisation of agriculture in the country did not correspond to the willingness or the ability of a large proportion of LPG cadres let alone the members at large to accept change at such a rapid rate. At the same time agriculture owing to its reliance more than ever on machinery, fuel and electricity was increasingly becoming subject to growing inefficiencies in the rest of the economy. Bottlenecks in the supply of essential products from industry to agriculture were beginning in 1968 already to have an impact on the efficiency of the LPGs in *Bezirk* Erfurt. The circumstances were thus by no means auspicious for any attempts to introduce a new pattern of agricultural organisation. 1968 however saw the SED leadership call for far-reaching change in the status of the LPGs as it was within the GDR's economic system. In particular, the VII. Party Congress of the SED in 1967 and the X. German Farmers' Congress in 1968 set a new agenda for the development of collective farming in the GDR advocating the deepening of horizontal cooperative relations between LPGs above all in crop production and no less significantly the development of new structures regulating the LPGs' supply of produce for public consumption. Attempts to force the rapid evolution of agricultural organisation served however only to demonstrate the limits of the SED regime's power in the countryside.

Speaking in March 1968 at the SED *Bezirksparteiaktivtagung*, the Secretary for Agriculture in the SED *Bezirksleitung* had stressed the need for ideological persuasion of LPG members before steps were taken in the formation of advanced cooperative relations between LPGs.³ As a farmer from an LPG Type I in *Kreis Sömmerda* was reported to have said with regard to suggestions of permanent cooperation in crop production: “It would be very easy...to make the whole thing law with a resolution. That would however be a breach of inner collective democracy and would erase the fact that ‘all power comes from the people.’” As it was the people, in this case collective farmers particularly in the LPG Type Is, remained deeply sceptical of any measure which appeared to change their status. The development of permanent cooperation in crop production between two or more LPGs appeared to entail far-reaching changes to rights of ownership of land and also to the independent status of the LPGs. It also appeared to sever the traditional connection between livestock and crop farming, which was something which farmers and agricultural functionaries in the state administration alike found hard to countenance.⁴

Ulbricht’s comments at the X. German Farmers’ Congress in 1968 were crucial inspiration for action to be taken by the KLRs to put renewed pressure on LPG chairmen to commit their farms to the rapid development of permanent cooperation in crop production. He appeared to announce that the structure of farming had to be and would be transformed in order to take advantage of the latest scientific and technological developments, which would in turn transform “the social organisation of production.” More clearly than ever before it was articulated that traditional ideas of maintaining mixed crop and livestock farms - what ever the size - had no place in the future of agriculture in the GDR. In Ulbricht’s own words: “relatively ever more independent large production units for crop production and for the different branches of livestock production will gradually develop.” Cooperation was confirmed as no mere temporary solution but the essential link in the chain of future agricultural development.⁵

At the same time a radical change to the status of agriculture within the economy was announced. The solution to the problems involved with integrating agriculture into more a

³ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/2-022 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung zu den Fragen und Aufgaben der soz. Landwirtschaft am 7.3.1968 Referat Genosse Lüdecke p.3.

⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/190 SED Kreisleitungssitzung, Teil Landwirtschaft 5.6.1968 pp.12-36.

⁵ SAPMO B-Arch DY 30 IV A/1/7/57 ZK Abt. Landwirtschaft, Seminarplan für das Seminar mit den Führungskadern aus der LuN am 13.11.1968 in Liebenwalde.

more flexible demand-orientated planned economic system was sought in the formation of a new administrative body designed to regulate agriculture in conjunction with the food industry. At the X. German Farmers' Congress in July 1968 it was proposed therefore that the agricultural councils (*Landwirtschaftsräte*) were expanded to include representatives of the food industries (*Räte für Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft* or RLNs). As a unified administration in the districts and the *Bezirke* the RLNs would, it was hoped, be able to oversee the coordinated development of agricultural organisation in line with the demands of the various food industries for industrial-scale, specialised production of certain agricultural products. In order to coordinate and fund the construction of the necessary facilities for this development, so-called cooperative unions (*Kooperationverbände* or KOVs) were formed combining farmers with representatives of the food processing and distribution industries. With the growth of so-called vertical cooperation between LPGs and the food industry, reflected in administrative terms by the formation of the KOVs, the long-term goal of transforming agriculture into a controllable and therefore somewhat more predictable branch of the wider economy appeared *in theory* to be rapidly approaching.

The actual prospects for implementing this vision of modern agriculture and responsive economic planning any time soon were rather slim. Attempts to introduce material incentive and closer economic regulation through strict cost analysis and socialist competition into the LPGs during the 1960s had been intended not only to stimulate production but also to enable the regulation of different strands of agricultural production more efficiently. Under the New Economic System, rather than being defined by economic planners in the state administration, agricultural development – i.e. the specialisation and concentration of production - was ultimately to be orchestrated directly according to the priorities set by those industries which relied on agricultural produce to function.⁶ Agricultural production was thus to be flexibly controlled according to contracts established between the food processing industries – the so-called final producers who were best placed to gauge demand for particular produce – and the LPG. The efficiency of vertical relations relied however on LPG chairmen implementing a system of contractual relations regulating the relationship between the various strands of crop and livestock

⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/A/2/3-179 Rat des Bezirkes, Erfurt, Bericht über den Stand der Konzeption und Erprobung einiger Grundsatzfragen zur weiteren Anwendung und Vervollkommnung des NÖSPL...19.11.1966 p.85.

production in accordance with *sozialistische Betriebswirtschaft* in agriculture. By 1968 very few chairmen had however been moved to go so far. The vast majority of LPGs had not developed contractual relations between crop production and livestock brigades without which little fundamental administrative and economic distinction could take place.⁷ By 1969 approximately 60% of LPGs in the *Bezirk* still had not implemented in full the system of *sozialistische Betriebswirtschaft* and LPG members had yet to be convinced of the value of vertical cooperation.⁸

The lack of trust in the system of vertical cooperation was unsurprising given the problematic relationship LPGs often had with the food industries. Assessing the situation in 1968 in the experimental KOVs already established in *Bezirk* Erfurt, the agricultural department of the SED *Bezirksleitung* concluded that the majority of final producers had proved unable to take effective responsibility for the whole chain of cooperation and were found to have resorted to “outdated working styles”, relying too heavily on bureaucratic methods to force LPGs to comply with their demands.⁹ In 1969 it became clear that representatives from final producers still not only did not necessarily have the requisite technical knowledge to make reasonable demands on farmers but also simply did not know enough about their suppliers to influence their development appropriately.¹⁰

If there were obstacles to LPGs’ inclusion in vertical cooperation, the prospects for horizontal cooperation between collective farms to enable specialisation of crop production were also slim. Pressure on KOGs in *Kreis* Sömmerda to develop specialised crop production in advance of most of the rest of the *Bezirk* demonstrated the lack of convinced support for the policy among collective farmers or indeed among many LPG brigadiers, board members and even LPG chairmen. In a number of KOGs in *Kreis* Sömmerda, the organisation of permanent cooperative crop production had been attempted during May and June. This had proved less than successful however. LPGs commonly chose not to share their machinery with one another. Few had specialised their crop production or changed their crop rotation or field structure in order to mass produce, even where they had been given access to the latest machine systems. Despite the arrival of new

⁷ SAPMO B-Arch DY30 IV A 2/2.023/220 Büro Gerhard Grüneberg Protokoll der Kreisbauernkonferenz Weimar am 18 und 19.4.1968, Referat Gen. Schöffler, Produktionsleiter und Vorsitzender des Kreislandwirtschaftsrat.

⁸ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/5000 DBD Bezirksverband Erfurt, Abt. Parteiorgane, Parteiinformation 27.2.1969.

⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/7-248/1 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Entwurf – Analyse über die Weiterführung des Experimentes des ÖSS..30.4.1968 p.3.

¹⁰ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/5000 DBD Bezirksverband Erfurt, Abt. Parteiorgane, Parteiinformation 27.2.1969.

technology in the form of the E512 combine harvester, the size of fields in even advanced cooperative communities (KOG) such as those based around Weissensee and Mannstedt, *Kreis Sömmerda*, where the average was below 15 hectares, still did not allow for the most effective deployment of machinery.¹¹

Even in the most advanced KOGs the integrated deployment of machinery had barely been put into practice. Tractor drivers in Schellenburg expressed no desire to take their tractors to work around Sömmerda; LPG members in Tunzenhausen warned each other against allowing Sömmerda to “put one over on them.” In the LPG Strausfurt the prospect of specialisation as part of cooperation raised the question of what the rest of the workforce would do. In LPG Grossbrennbach there was opposition to cooperation on the grounds that they were doing “quite well already and saw no reason to give others a boost”.¹² The farmers of successful LPGs were rarely happy to cooperate with their underachieving neighbours. How, the crop production brigadier in Kleinneuhausen wondered in 1968, could he convince his fellow farmers of the benefits of cooperative relations as long as Beichlingen and other LPGs within the KOG continued to have such bad yields.¹³ There was little desire among either collective farmers or their functionaries to sacrifice their success for the sake of their neighbours. Thus although all KOGs in the district had worked out exact plans for the integrated deployment of machinery, putting these measures into practice was undermined by instances of “*Betriebsegoismus*”.¹⁴

Persuading the rank and file members of the collective farms of the value to them of a joint crop production unit within their KOG was no small matter. The practical implementation of cooperation required fundamental changes not only to working practices but the whole manner in which farmers perceived their status and identity. As the chairman of the LPG Vehra, *Kreis Sömmerda* put it: “the step to a common crop production and the development of various cooperative relations is comparable to the step from being a private farmer to being a collective farmer. But back then there was a clear statute which indicated to each person what his rights and obligations were and everyone knew exactly, from their neighbours’ experience too, how things proceeded and what

¹¹ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/190 SED Kreisleitungssitzung, Teil Landwirtschaft 5.6.1968 p.20.

¹² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-161 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Handmaterial zur Berichterstattung des Sekretariats der SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda...7.5.1968 p.51.

¹³ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/190 SED Kreisleitungssitzung, Teil Landwirtschaft, 5.6.1968 p.21.

¹⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/190 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Zu mündlichen Berichten vor dem Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung 7.5.1968 p.1.

awaited them. With the common crop production there is still a great deal unclear and we can't give concrete answers to the questions members pose." Collective farmers were not on the whole willing to agree to the principle of the matter while their pay and conditions in the new system remained uncertain. "How will pay be measured out fairly – will it be set at the level of the highest paying LPG? Will all the best functionaries work in crop production? How are all the requirements of the plan to be met if we specialise our crop production."¹⁵ Even top- and mid-level cadres were reluctant to advocate something without any clear idea how it would affect their future. What status, they wondered, would they have within the new leadership structure in the joint crop production and the LPG. More seriously still, what if any status would the LPG have? If cooperative livestock units were set up alongside the cooperative crop production unit, would the individual LPG cease to exist altogether?¹⁶

Despite the fact that such questions remained unresolved, the RLN (K) and the SED *Kreisleitung* in *Kreis Sömmerda* in particular, but also in neighbouring districts such as *Kreis Bad Langensalza* and *Weimar*¹⁷, pressed cooperative councils to develop specialised cooperative crop production during the coming year. In accordance with the apparent instructions given at the X. German Farmers' Congress and the VII. SED Party Congress, LPG chairmen who were anxious to be at the forefront of agricultural development set about arranging crop production in their KOGs independently of the individual LPGs. By February 1969 on paper there had been some success. Of the planned 9 KOGs in *Kreis Sömmerda*, 6 had already fixed their main specialisation in crop production. Above all the RLN (K) claimed to have finally ended any tendencies in the district toward establishing Grand LPGs through the full merger of the constituent collective farms in the KOG. It was clear however that mid-level cadres – technical advisors and heads of the work brigades – in the LPGs remained doubtful of the sense of separating crop production from the LPGs. There were also serious disagreements among leading cadres in a number of cooperative councils which had the potential to scupper harmonious cooperation.¹⁸

¹⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/101 Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der MV – Monat November 29.11.1968 p.96

¹⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/7-268 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Faktenmaterial zu Aktivtagung der KOG Strausfurt am 26.6.1968 pp.42-49

¹⁷ The KOG Berstedt, Kreis Weimar was among the most advanced in the GDR in developing specialised production through cooperation. As an experimental model for the most efficient means of establishing agriculture on an industrial-scale it had an exceptional status within the Bezirk, which enabled it to develop organisationally far in advance of other KOG.

¹⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/200 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Perspektiv 10.4.1969 p.137.

The development of the scale of crop production had gone a long way since the early 1960s. The pressure for even more rapid progress in the latter half of 1968 and 1969 via cooperative crop production came however increasingly at the expense of suitable preparation and persuasion of collective farmers. Much of the apparent progress which zealous LPG chairmen and RLN functionaries claimed to have made in organising cooperative crop production had been achieved so rapidly that there were real concerns that in practice it might have an adverse effect on production. Given growing problems in the economy at large as well as unrest in Czechoslovakia, there was arguably good reason to be wary of any measures which might unnecessarily undermine food production within the country. Whether this entered into his calculations or not, Walter Ulbricht himself made some damning criticisms during the 10th Plenary Session (or Plenum) of the SED Central Committee in April 1969 of the progress of agricultural transformation which his comments in 1968 had apparently sparked.¹⁹ The response to this intervention in the LPGs revealed a degree of confusion and deception alongside suppressed resentment and conflict throughout LPGs in the *Bezirk* which thoroughly surprised agricultural functionaries at all levels in the regime hierarchy. Enormous change had been achieved in the past decade; however the limits and the possibilities of the social transformation of the countryside could now be seen in truer light. The extent to which agricultural administration at the grass roots was formed by and beholden to the interests and attitudes of collective farmers rather than the malleable object of socialist modernising policy was once again demonstrated.

The Crisis Precipitated

Ulbricht's intervention was necessary because certain aspects of the party line had, he claimed, been misinterpreted. Crop production was not to become independent of the LPGs, but as he had said at the X. German Farmers' Congress "relatively" independent. The food industries were to have a coordinating and directing role over agriculture through the use of mutual contractual relations – not through their dominance of the councils of cooperative unions (KOV). There were thus two lines to his criticism of the situation in agriculture: the organisation of the cooperative unions had given too much

¹⁹ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/IV 2/1/395 Tagungen des ZK – 10. Plenum des ZK, 24.4.1969, Schlusswort des Genossen Ulbricht pp.211-221.

power to administrators in the food industry and undermined the independent status of the LPGs; secondly a minority of LPGs in advanced states of cooperation had gone too far too quickly in the development of independent crop production. Change at such a rate was not suitable for all LPGs and thus these LPGs were no longer to receive publicity as models of the correct path of development. The cooperation based around Berlstedt, *Kreis* Weimar had for many years been a model of advanced socialist agricultural policy. However in the context of the 10th Plenum in 1969, Walter Ulbricht made it clear that Berlstedt was no longer an example which should be followed. Although not wholly critical of the developments made by the LPGs in the KOG Berlstedt, the overall direction was no longer to be publicised, particularly as regards specialisation. Central to his comments was the notion of inviolability of the LPG as an economic unit, in which the principles of collective democracy were to be meticulously implemented. If a separate crop production was to exist, it was to be a sub-department of the KOG and its leaders subordinate to the chairmen of the LPGs. Moreover Ulbricht argued that the development of cooperative relations in crop production must and could only occur gradually in consultation with LPG members.²⁰

At a meeting of the RLN of the GDR in May 1969 to evaluate the 10th Plenum, Ulbricht's arguments against the independence of the crop production units were reiterated.²¹ In the ensuing discussion it became clear how widespread divergent conceptions of the imminent development of agricultural organisation had become. At the meeting the influential chairman of the LPG Dahlen described how teachers at a technical college found the essence of the 10th Plenum difficult to grasp, given what they themselves had been told would be the next stage in the GDR's agricultural development. It had been drummed into them thus far, one teacher told him, that in the future: "of the LPG only the telephone and the desk would be left", in other words, the establishment of independent cooperative units by the KOG was indeed as far as they understood the situation, the first step on the road to abandoning the idea of collective property altogether.²²

²⁰ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/IV 2/1/395 Tagungen des ZK – 10. Plenum des ZK, 24.4.1969, Schlusswort des Genossen Ulbricht pp.211-221.

²¹ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.2023/169 RLN der DDR – 6. Tagung am 16.5.1969 Beitrag des Ministers Georg Ewald.

²² SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.2023/169 RLN der DDR – 6. Tagung am 16.5.1969, Beitrag des Genossen Döhler, Vorsitzender der LPG Dahlen.

There was certainly a tendency in much of the theoretical literature to predict the dissolution of the class of the collective farmers in the near future. A dominant role for food industries in controlling agricultural production and the transfer of farm land from collective (*genossenschaftlich*) to cooperative (*kooperativ*) use seemed to point towards a change in the status of those working in agriculture and render the LPGs increasingly obsolete. This attitude was not wholly surprising given the continual and deliberate erosion of the proprietary ties between individual farmers and the land they farmed inherent in the reform of LPGs during the 1960s. Gerhard Grüneberg, speaking to the national RLN, nevertheless now made clear that too much theorising had gone on, particularly as regards the guiding role of the food industries in conjunction with agriculture. “There are mountains of books, and one is amazed, when one feels obliged to busy oneself with the matter, by all that has been written about agriculture and the food industry.” His message to the delegates at the conference was that it was not practical for agriculture in general and the LPGs in particular to have their independence compromised. Farmers and not simply administrators were still essential to the effective management of a sector of the economy which remained in many respects subject to uncontrollable (unpredictable and thus unplannable!) natural conditions and would not submit simply to the plans of a bureaucrat, however efficient he might be.²³

Criticism of recent developments in some LPGs sent shock waves running through the state and party administration concerned with agriculture. To some extent Ulbricht (and in his wake Grüneberg) had in fact done little more than publicly rein in those zealous functionaries who sought to realise the long-term goals of transformation in agriculture ahead of schedule. The essential course of agricultural development was more or less the same as before. Cooperative relations were still to be at the heart of a gradual move towards greater specialisation. The Grand LPG had not been overtly approved as a more effective means of reaching industrial-scale production. The persuasion of LPG members and their subsequent ratification of new measures in accordance with the demands of ‘collective democracy’ now as before was required (at least rhetorically) before progress could be made. Yet it soon became clear that the administration of agriculture from top to

²³ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.2023/169 RLN der DDR – 6. Tagung am 16.5.1969, Beitrag des Genossen Grüneberg.

bottom was in fact highly sensitive to any suggestion that the steps taken thus far had been in any way mistaken.

In the course of 1968 and 1969 terms such as “rump LPG” had begun to be used to describe what was left of some LPGs in the *Bezirk* once all-but-independent joint crop production units had been set up in a few of the KOGs. While the use of this pejorative phrase clearly expressed what was going wrong with the hasty development of cooperative crop production, there had equally clearly been some confidence among LPG functionaries that pursuing the administrative separation of crop production from the LPGs had been officially sanctioned. In some KOGs in *Kreis Sömmerda* there were reports that LPGs and joint crop production units had separated so much that headed letter paper had been designed and company name signs put up advertising their new status as either a “Cooperative crop production enterprise” or a “Livestock production enterprise”. In such cases, where Ulbricht’s comments had some clear and direct relevance, i.e. in those few LPGs where intentions to proceed rapidly with developing separate specialised crop and livestock production had already begun to be put into practice, the *Kreisleitungen* were quick to respond. In the KOG Bachra, *Kreis Sömmerda*, the development of cooperation in crop production had proceeded so far that the joint crop production was on the verge of proclaiming its independence from its constituent LPGs. The SED *Kreisleitung* intervened to ensure that the head of the crop production was subordinate to an LPG chairman and responsible to the cooperative council. The chairman of the cooperative council could not thus at the same time be the head of the crop production unit. Furthermore the joint crop production was to be renamed to identify its subordinate position to the LPGs. It was now to be known as a Cooperative Crop Production Unit, (*Kooperative Abteilung Pflanzenproduktion* or KAP), emphasising its dependence on the LPGs for its legal status.²⁴

Responding directly to the technical criticisms made by Ulbricht was one thing. Dealing with the confusion and rumour which abounded among farmers, LPG functionaries and the state apparatus in the districts was quite another. The variety of responses to Ulbricht’s comments in the LPGs and the district party and state administration revealed the complex balance in the relationship between collective

²⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/200 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Probleme der Kooperation – Beschluss Politbüro vom 25.7.1969 pp.150-159.

farmers, their leading functionaries and the state and party hierarchy. The impossibility of agricultural transformation without some degree of consent from collective farmers themselves and the often ambiguous role played by LPG functionaries in communicating state authority while protecting personal and local interests was once again demonstrated.

Crisis and Confusion in Agricultural Administration

Such were the tensions which had developed in recent years within LPGs, within KOGs and between LPGs and the district authorities that Ulbricht's comments were seized upon as an excuse for attacking all that seemed to be wrong with the status quo in agriculture. What appeared to give farmers and LPG functionaries alike the grounds for their attacks was the emphasis placed upon the independence of the LPG and the importance of consultation as part of collective democracy. Anger and resentment over the lack of consultation with LPG members on policies such as cooperation or the introduction of socialist business economics had reached boiling point. There were thus various strands to the complaints unleashed at the grassroots by the 10th Plenum, not all of which bore an immediate relation to the actual subject of Ulbricht's own criticisms.

A meeting of the SED *Kreisleitung* Sömmerda in July 1969 to discuss Ulbricht's concluding remarks heard a report on the reaction of farmers in the district. It was claimed hopefully that the majority of the collective farm members understood correctly that the 10th Plenum did not mean a correction of agricultural policy but rather a continuation of the resolutions of the VII. SED Party Congress, with the caveat that this process must not be mismanaged through impatience. In the first days and weeks after the 10th Plenum however mid-level cadres were marked out as being particularly problematic spreading the opinion that "thanks to the 10th Plenum they could all now take their time and that cooperation would be scaled back." More seriously Ulbricht's remarks were being interpreted as a licence for collective farms to assert their individual independence from outside interference, be it from other LPGs or the state apparatus. One chairman of an LPG was reported to have collected all the newspaper articles he could find on the subject of collective democracy. His intention appears to have been to use them as proof that he could not legitimately implement change without the agreement of his members.²⁵

²⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/4.10/190 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreisleitungssitzung 3.7.1969 pp.136-155.

Members of the LPG Lützensömmern in *Kreis* Bad Langensalza were among the first in *Bezirk* Erfurt to take the opportunity to voice their frustration and re-claim some independence. The KOR and the RLN (K), they complained, had too often taken decisions affecting the LPG members without any prior discussion of the matter and they had thus been forced to accept what amounted to *faits accomplis*.²⁶ Reports compiled by the DBD in *Bezirk* Erfurt during May 1969 on the mood in the countryside highlighted the sense among LPG members that so far they had been bullied into things or not listened to sufficiently by functionaries at various levels of agricultural administration from the LPG board, the KOR up into the district state administration and this situation would now have to be rectified. In Erfurt-Land in particular, DBD members complained about the damage done to the independence of their LPG because of the pressure put upon them by the RLN (K).²⁷ Such complaints could be more or less justified in the context of the 10th Plenum. However doubts over the validity of previous agricultural policy began too to be expressed. LPG members made the point that they had the right to be properly consulted and prepared for cooperation and the separation of crop and livestock production. They also however began to suggest that they had a right actively to determine their own path of development. If cooperative relations could only be developed against the will of collective farmers then, the question was raised, was it not correct that no such relations exist until farmers were convinced of their value? In *Kreis* Arnstadt as well as *Kreis* Bad Langensalza, collective farmers who in the past had been particularly obstinate in their resistance to cooperation began to draw this conclusion. Where few or no extensive cooperative relations had developed between LPGs, they considered themselves right all along not to have participated in cooperation. Doubts even began to be raised as to whether KOGs could continue to exist at all, if the majority of LPGs opposed them.²⁸

Faced with the vindication of collective farmers' hostility to cooperation after the 10th Plenum, LPG functionaries and the staff of the RLN (K) appeared for a time to be at a loss as to how to respond. The chairman of the LPG Kalteneber in Heiligenstadt expressed his

²⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5 – 183 SED Bezirksleitung, Abt. Parteiorgane, Kurzinformation, Stimmen von Genossenschaftsbäuerinnen und –bauern zum Schlusswort des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf der 10. Tagung des ZK zum Problem der soz. Landwirtschaft 21.5.1969 p.326.

²⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-410 DBD Bezirksverband, Bericht an den 1. Sekretär der Bezirksleitung der SED 23.5.1969 pp.174-180.

²⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5 – 183 SED Bezirksleitung, Abt. Parteiorgane, Kurzinformation, Stimmen von Genossenschaftsbäuerinnen und –bauern zum Schlusswort des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf der 10. Tagung des ZK zum Problem der soz. Landwirtschaft 21.5.1969 p.327.

confusion and disillusionment: “the question which concerns me is whether agricultural policy has changed since the 10th Plenum? There are currently many discussions: cooperation is going to be broken up, or cooperation will lead to the liquidation of the class of the collective farmer. I’m not against new things, but it’s not so easy for us up here as it is for those farmers down in the plains.”²⁹ In *Kreis* Heiligenstadt, Mühlhausen and Erfurt-Land, staff of the district councils appeared to be uncertain what was going on in the LPG assemblies.³⁰ DBD sources noted too that the LPG were no longer receiving guidance from staff from the *SED Kreisleitung* or the RLN (K) who themselves no doubt were unclear what the correct path ought to be. In Steinrode, *Kreis* Worbis some DBD members pointed out that representatives of the district authorities used to participate in every meeting of the cooperative council, but had not turned up once since the 10th Plenum.³¹

Even where the RLN (K) did attempt to continue to advise the LPGs however, it was soon clear that concrete decisions about the future of individual KOGs were not possible. Following the 10th Plenum, the RLN (K) in *Kreis* Sömmerda initially continued to press ahead encouraging the development of joint crop production in the KOG Köllda. The economics advisory service attached to the RLN (K) had worked out plans and practices for a joint cooperative crop production in the KOG Köllda which appeared to be in tune with the 10th Plenum line as they “in no way limited the role of the LPGs and foresaw the payment of farmers via the individual collective farms.” There remained however a major obstacle to the establishment of a joint cooperative crop production in the KOG: namely the “current ideological attitude of members.” This the RLN (K) admitted would have to be discussed shortly in “comprehensive consultation” in the LPGs.³² The following month in a discussion at the district RLN in *Kreis* Sömmerda it was reported however that the fixed attitude of LPG members in a number of collective farms was that cooperation in crop production should be broken up and the LPGs allowed to be independent again. Among these was the LPG “Neuer Weg” (“New Path”) Köllda. In a letter sent by the

²⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-183 Abt. Parteiorgane, Kurzinformation, Stimmen von Genossenschaftsbäuerinnen und –bauern... 21.5.1969 p.326.

³⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-183 Abt. Parteiorgane, Kurzinformation über den Stand der Durchführung... 17.7.1969 p.392.

³¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-410 DBD Bezirksverband, Auswertung der Berichte der Kreisverbände über Meinungen unserer Mitglieder zum 10. Plenum des ZK der SED und unserer 5. Parteivorstandssitzung undated pp.181-186.

³² ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/200 RLN Sömmerda, Produktionsleitung an die SED Kreisleitung, über KOG Köllda, 17.7.1969 p.139.

chairman and party secretary to the chairman of their KOG, they explained the decision of the LPG's board to withdraw from cooperative crop production. The letter concluded with the chairman and party secretary expressing their regret at this decision having been reached. They pointed out however that even they could not get around the words: "the farmers decide".³³

By mid-August, the RLN (K) could not help but notice that some KOGs were likely to be hard put to continue even with minor forms of cooperation between LPGs during the harvest. The KOG Mannstedt, it found, was more or less falling apart. In the neighbouring LPGs in Buttstädt, Olbersleben and Essleben the opinion was widespread, among LPG cadres as well as ordinary farmers, that joint crop production would be broken up and the LPGs allowed to become independent again. It was thus unsurprising that in the KOG Buttstädt even the use of machinery in combination between LPG Essleben and LPG Buttstädt had fallen apart and each LPG had begun to employ its own machinery for its own purposes. All in all, in the words of the SED *Kreisleitung*, the level of cooperation in this part of the district had "just about reached zero".³⁴ At the August meetings of the SED party organisations in the LPGs in Sömmerda district, the backlash against cooperation continued. In Werningshausen among other places, the opinion was widespread among LPG members that the deployment of harvesters in cooperation put their LPG at a disadvantage.³⁵

Looking back on 1969, a report on the development of cooperation by the SED *Bezirksleitung* admitted that "immediately after the 10th Plenum people no longer worked conscientiously towards realising and fixing cooperative relations." Among leading cadres in the LPG as well as in the state apparatus there was insecurity and a wait and see attitude to the further development of cooperation. In 69 out of 150 cooperative communities in the *Bezirk* a joint unit for crop production had in theory been established. However given the confusion and conflicts surrounding cooperative production, these KAP were often not particularly efficient and their inefficiency had only been exacerbated by the poor weather during 1969. Justified dissatisfaction with the whole notion of the

³³ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/4.10/200 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Vorsitzender und Parteisekretär der LPG "Neuer Weg" Kölleda an den Vorsitzenden der KOG Kölleda 28.8.1969 p.163.

³⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/200 Information über Beratung der Produktionsleitung des RLN (K) am 14.8.1969 pp.160-162.

³⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA SED Kreisleitung IV/B/4.10/101 Abt. Parteiorgane, Bericht über die im August stattgefundenen Parteiversammlungen p.137.

KAP among LPG members developed as a result along with the revived tendency among leading cadre to advocate the Grand LPG as a better alternative.³⁶

Now that the need for large-scale production was widely accepted, it seemed to many farmers, the best alternative to cooperation, which seemed to solve the conflicts between LPGs and confusion over ownership and distribution of profits and costs between crop and livestock production, was once again the Grand LPG. In December 1969, the situation in the KOG Greussen, *Kreis* Sondershausen, contrasted with that of its near neighbour, the model KOG Weissensee in *Kreis* Sömmerda. Here dissatisfaction with cooperation had restarted arguments that either there should be a merger of the constituent LPGs – producing a Grand LPG – or that each should go their own way.³⁷ As far as the SED *Bezirksleitung* in Erfurt was concerned the failure of LPGs to advance with establishing cooperative crop production following the 10th Plenum and the growing support for Grand LPGs among LPG members and cadres alike was continuing lack of sufficient SED presence and influence in farming.

The lack of an influential body of advocates of SED agricultural policy promoting the continuation of cooperation in either the KOGs or in individual LPGs clearly increased the chances that alternative ideas would gain widespread support among the general membership. In January and February 1970 a number of reports came in to the SED *Bezirksleitung* of party organisations whose members claimed to be unable to exert any influence on the boards of the LPGs. In many LPGs, party comrades complained that they were not being sufficiently informed. SED members in Bad Tennstedt remarked: “whenever the discussion is about decisive questions, we don’t get asked, but rather find out about the decisions made by the board only in the pub later on.” In Ossmanstedt SED members similarly complained: “basically we don’t get asked at all, if for example some thing needs to be built, that’s the board’s decision alone.”³⁸

Where the SED was weak, this was often put down to the existence of a strong alternative party group. DBD members occupying the key functionary positions in

³⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/7-267 Abt. Landwirtschaft Information über den Stand der Entwicklung der Kooperationsbeziehungen im Bezirk Erfurt und die sich daraus ergebenden Schlussfolgerungen...19.1.1970 pp.79-95.

³⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/7-268 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Information über die Aussprache des Genossen Meister mit dem Sekretär für Landwirtschaft der SED Kreisleitung Sondershausen, Genossen Junge am 19.12.1969, 22.12.1969.

³⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-165 Sektor Operativ, Faktenmaterial über einige Probleme der Parteiarbeit in der Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft Jan 1970 p.392; IV/B/2/9.01-289 Abt. Parteiorgane, Bericht über eine Aussprache mit einer Parteigruppe der BPO der SED der LPG “Rotes Banner” Körner, Krs. Mühlhausen 3.12.1969 p.226; Abt. Parteiorgane Protokoll über die Gruppensprache mit Genossen in der LPG Bad Tennstedt am 3.12.1969, 4.12.1969 p.240.; Information über die am 3.12.1969 in der PO der LPG Type III, Willerstedt, Krs. Apolda, durchgeführte Aussprache 5.12.1969 p.255

particular appeared in a number of cases to be blamed for the failure of SED organisations to have sufficient influence over the direction of individual LPG's development. Naturally there were many cases in which DBD cadres and party groups in general worked well with SED party members and sought actively to implement current SED policy. The support for the Grand LPG and hostility towards cooperation shown by some DBD members however raised suspicion in the SED *Kreisleitungen*.³⁹ As a consequence, where cooperative relations had ground to a halt, DBD members in leading positions in the LPGs were suspected, whether fairly or not, of deliberately undermining cooperation while speaking publicly in their favour.⁴⁰

In a meeting with the first secretary of the SED *Kreisleitung*, Weimar in August 1970, the chairman of the LPG Kromsdorf, himself a member of the DBD, sought to outline some of the basic problems with the development of cooperation since the 10th Plenum in his KOG. In his analysis, the mood in the collective farms had worsened because: "the 10th Plenum has not gone out of the minds of the members yet." At the same time the new organisational structure of the crop production was not conducive to efficient farming. It was proving difficult, for example, for LPG chairmen to have to apply for access to machinery and manpower to a functionary – the head of the crop production unit – who was technically not his superior. The dropping value of the work unit and a cut in the funds available for bonuses had also added to the general dissatisfaction with the new arrangements. The SED *Kreisleitung* however chose to see the problem as essentially one of ideological discipline. Their report concluded: "it certainly does not overstate the case to make the assertion that cooperative relations above all are hindered by such cadres as do not belong to the SED".⁴¹

Whether this assessment was entirely fair or not, in the aftermath of the 10th Plenum, it became clear that the SED regime had failed to close the ideological deficit in the LPGs. The long-term goals of socialist agricultural policy continued to be regarded

³⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-165 Sektor Operativ, Faktenmaterial über einige Probleme der Parteiarbeit in der Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft Jan. 1970 p.392, SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2973 DBD Bezirksvorstand, Abt. Parteiorgane, Neuwahlabschlussbericht 21.1.1970.

⁴⁰ SAPMO B-Arch, DY60/2973 DBD Parteivorstand, Abt. Parteiorgane, Wertung des Weiteren Verlaufs der Diskussionen zur Vorebreitung des Perspektivplanes; DBD Bezirksverband, Parteiinformation, 11.8.1970; DBD Bezirksverband, Abt. Parteiorgane, Neuwahlabschlussbericht 21.1.1970; ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/4.10/198 SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Kreisbauernkonferenz am 4. und 5.3.1970, Diskussionsbeitrag K. Schwarz, LPG Mannstedt pp.157-165; IV/B/2/5-165 Abt. Parteiorgane Erste Einschätzungen der Kreisleitungssitzungen zur Auswertung der 14. Tagung des ZK 19.1.1971 pp.568-574.

⁴¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/7-268 SED Kreisleitung der SED Weimar, Bericht an Genossen Lüdecke, Abt. Landwirtschaft der Bezirksleitung 12.10.1970 pp.371-375.

with suspicion by collective farmers and for the time being the apparatus through which agricultural policy was to be communicated and implemented in the LPGs appeared at best unsure of itself and at worst to have broken down. Amid a worsening economic crisis, the district state authorities appeared unable to give sufficient guidance or practical advice to the LPGs on how they ought to organise themselves. At the same time, LPG chairmen found it impossible to agree with each other on how to proceed with cooperation. Under these circumstances, the possibilities for a coherent programme of future development to be agreed between LPG cadres, LPG members and the district agricultural councils was in most cases remote.

Administrative Gridlock

After the upheavals resulting from the 10th Plenum, how LPGs of various Types, in their various stages of development towards merger and cooperation could or should proceed to develop their production facilities remained obscure to LPG members and their functionaries. The RLN (K) appeared too to be reticent in dictating a coherent direction to the LPGs given the re-assertion of collective democracy and consultation of collective farmers which Ulbricht's comments had provoked. Whether or not cooperation between LPGs, leading to the ultimate separation of crop production from livestock production, ought to be actively pursued for the time being was once again cast into doubt. By the same token, LPG chairmen were not sure whether they ought rather to pursue merger with their neighbours or indeed whether they should seek to remain independent and build up their production facilities individually.⁴²

Dealing with these dilemmas was made far more complicated by the atmosphere of uncertainty and fear of financial catastrophe among collective farmers which resulted from sudden shortages in the supply of essential equipment to LPGs in 1969 and 1970. DBD functionaries in *Kreis Sömmerda* and *Kreis Worbis* found they could give little satisfactory explanation to collective farmers who could not understand why the supply of essential spare parts for machinery was so much worse than in previous years.⁴³ A lower than average yield from the 1969 harvest added to the sense of crisis in some parts of the

⁴² SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2973 DBD Bezirksvorstand, Abt. Parteiorgane, Wertung des weiteren Verlaufs der Diskussionen zur Vorbereitung des Perspektivplanes 21.9.1970.

⁴³ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2973 DBD Kreisverband Worbis, Abt. Parteiorgane, Parteiinformation 16.2.1970; DBD Kreisverband Sömmerda, Abt. Parteiorgane, Information über die Arbeit unserer Partei in der Wahlvorbereitung 9.2.1970.

for less than half the LPGs. For the majority there was still considerable opposition to cooperation. A number of SED *Kreisleitungen* were still reporting a lack of clarity over the “meaning in principle and objective necessity of cooperative relations” among LPG members and functionaries. In *Kreis Sömmerda* LPGs were still considering withdrawing from KOGs.⁵¹ In the KOG Tannroda, *Kreis Weimar*, the LPG chairmen themselves were thought to be preventing the development of cooperative crop production by simply not taking the steps in practice which they had publicly agreed upon in the cooperative council. The SED *Kreisleitung* regarded this state of affairs as the result of unwillingness rather than incapability. Allegedly the discussions of the KOR were also notorious among some members of the LPGs for failing to correspond to reality, earning their meetings the nickname: “the fairytale hour”.⁵²

Reports on the mood among collective farmers paint a rather desperate picture, with stagnation in development, problems with production and an apparent inability for either the RLN (K) or the cooperative councils to take action to improve the situation in the individual farms.⁵³ As a result of the conflicts which cooperation in crop production seemed to cause, there was certainly no consensus in the *Bezirk* that the separate specialisation of crop and livestock production was indeed the correct way to develop agriculture. During 1971 there were a number of discussions with farmers in the LPGs where cooperative crop production units had been recently established. The same complaints came up repeatedly in nearly all the LPGs in the district where such discussions were held, that the new relationship between crop and livestock was having a negative effect on the quantity and quality of the feed on offer. As a result both ordinary members and leading cadres of the LPGs began openly to suggest that the “tearing asunder” of crop and livestock production was mistaken.⁵⁴ Even though LPG cadres were known to have been removed from their posts for actively advocating the Grand LPG as an alternative to the separation of crop and livestock production, there remained considerable uncertainty as to whether such views would not soon be considered

⁵¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-165 Abt. Parteiorgane, Erste Einschätzungen der Kreisleitungssitzungen zur Auswertung der 14. Tagung des ZK 19.1.1971 p.568.

⁵² ‘Fairytale hour’ translates here the German “Märchenstunde”: ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/7-268 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Information über Aussprachen in der KOG Tannroda, Kreis Weimar 8.3.1971.

⁵³ KA Sömmerda 264, RdK Sömmerda, Untersuchung der 4. Arbeitsgruppe zur Vorbereitung der Kreisdelegiertenkonferenz der SED in Sömmerda 1.3.1971.

⁵⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/149 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Aussprache in der LPG “Rotes Banner” Büchel 7.4.1971 p.83; RLN (K), Aussprache in der Milchproduktion in einem Kollektiv der Milchviehhaltung der LPG Beichlingen 22.4.1971 p.86.

acceptable. Until the outcome of the SED's VIII. Party Congress was known, LPG chairmen were known to be hesitant to pursue cooperation.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The last two years of the decade demonstrated more dramatically than ever before the limits of the state apparatus' ability to drive forward transformation and the lack of strong SED influence over farmers. The shifting parameters within which agricultural development had taken place were necessarily shaped by technological advancement and the transformative ideals of socialist ideology. However they were also clearly shaped by the need for compromise with the personal interests of collective farmers themselves, as they were managed (and mismanaged) by the functionaries of the LPGs and the agricultural administration at the grassroots. With the future still uncertain, the failure to deal with the lack of consensus of interests between the SED regime and LPG members and their functionaries exposed the fragility of what up to then had seemed increasingly stable structures of authority in the districts.

Out of the conflict and confusion arising after the 10th Plenum and the more general economic uncertainty caused by the failure of economic reforms, paradoxically a new relationship began however to take shape between the SED leadership and the agricultural workforce. As ever greater restrictions were placed on private production, increasingly well trained and specialised collective farmers began to accept the necessity of specialising agricultural production and actively supported the development of new and stable structures of agricultural administration at the grassroots. The promise of an end to austerity and a secure future under a more rigorous system of economic planning began too to enable both new and older generations of collective farmers to accept a reconfiguration of the agricultural system.

⁵⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/7-268 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Information über Kooperationen des Kreises Weimar (Auftrag des Genossen Lüdecke) 30.8.1971.

SECTION 3

Stable Instability:

Economic Stagnation and the End of Transformation

CHAPTER 7

Regaining the Initiative: From Ulbricht to Honecker

“All new things have to get properly settled in...there is agreement with the social development as a whole, but it must be organised properly. Then we'll get something out of it.....We don't want to earn less.”¹

(Opinions of LPG members in Stotternheim showing their tentative acceptance of plans for the formation of the KAP.)

The explicit transfer of power at the top of the SED hierarchy from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker in 1971 sealed a shift in the approach of the SED leadership towards the management of the economy. Austerity and economic reform in the pursuit of utopian goals of social and economic transformation were broadly speaking abandoned in order to overcome a deficit of popular support for the SED regime. In its stead a form of consumer socialism was established which sought to satisfy the material needs of the population though with little consideration for the longer term costs to the state's economic viability. The transfer of power from Ulbricht to Honecker was thus an important turning point. Measures to improve living and working conditions in rural communities, along with increased investment in agriculture engendered greater confidence in the possibilities for financial security under a transformed system of agricultural organisation. The gradual return of coherence to the state administration's approach to agriculture, renewed efforts by the SED to assert its influence over the LPGs themselves and the final restriction on private production with the demise of the LPG Type Is were vital in subduing any lingering opposition to the transformation of agriculture through cooperation. The stabilisation of the structures through which SED policies were communicated to and the manner in which they were received by collective farmers during the 1970s must also be seen however in the context of the conflicts and accommodations made between farmers, LPG chairmen and the functionaries of the district state and party apparatus during the previous decade.

¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7 – 356 SED Kreisleitung Erfurt-Land an den Sekretär für Landwirtschaft der Bezirksleitung, Information über den Stand der Bildung der KAP Stotternheim/Grossrudstedt, die gegenwärtig stehenden Probleme und der sich daraus ergebenden Schlussfolgerungen für die Leitungstätigkeit. 1.3.1973 p.83.

Rural Living and Working Conditions in the 1960s

The 1960s have been regarded as the dynamic years of the GDR's development.² The security lent the SED leadership by the erection of the Wall at the start of the decade allowed Ulbricht to lead the GDR down a path of radical social transformation and attempted economic reform. They were certainly challenging and exciting years for those who sought to push forward the transformation of the scale and organisation of agricultural production and with it the social fabric of rural society. The gradual professionalisation of the agricultural workforce through increased qualification, the provision of more advanced machinery to the LPG and the increased scale of crop production and to a lesser extent livestock production under the auspices of the relatively independent district agricultural councils were elements of what was for some a positive transformation of agriculture since collectivisation. The consolidation of the LPG and their stabilisation as independent financial institutions certainly brought a degree of harmony and prosperity to some rural communities relative to the period directly after the completion of full collectivisation.³ The 1960s and early 1970s have certainly been said by some former collective farmers with hindsight to have been "the best years" in the GDR.⁴

As we have seen however collective farmers of all Types, but especially in the LPG Type I, were by no means convinced of the benefits of this process of socialist modernisation thus far. Moreover in terms of living and working conditions in rural communities, there was much less cause for contentment: agricultural transformation did not bring with it comprehensive or consistent improvement to working conditions around the *Bezirk*, while Ulbricht's wider economic reforms came at the price of a degree of austerity which few in rural communities were ultimately willing to pay.

In the early 1960s, in the first years after the completion of collectivisation, the villages of *Bezirk* Erfurt were by no means idyllic. The amount of labour required by collective farmers in all sorts of LPG was back-breaking and rendered doubly hard by difficult weather conditions and a relative lack of resources of building materials and

² See for example the collection of essays in Schildt, A., Siegfried, D., Lammers, K. (eds.) *Dynamische Zeiten* (Hamburg 2000).

³ Siegfried Kuntsche pinpoints the positive impact of the NES and the Agricultural Councils in enabling the LPGs a greater degree of self determination over the development of their production facilities during the 1960s, which in turn encouraged greater identification with the LPGs. In contrast the 1970s saw greater centralisation of state control over investment and limitation of local autonomy. Kuntsche, S. "Die Umgestaltung der Eigentumsverhältnisse und der Produktionsstruktur in der Landwirtschaft" in Keller, D. et al. (eds.) *Ansichten zur Geschichte der DDR Vol. 1* (Berlin 1993) pp.191-211.

⁴ This was the comment of farmers interviewed by Christel Nehrig, Nehrig Ch., "Das Leben auf dem Lande: Die Genossenschaften (LPG)" in Badstübner E (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders. Leben in der DDR* (Berlin 2000) pp.195-216 here p.216.

machinery, fertiliser and good quality seed, to name but a few shortages. Next to no villages were connected to a central water supply, while the quality of the road network and access to public transport left many communities in relative isolation. Access to the latest consumer products and labour saving devices was very limited given the problems of delivery and the size of the local village shop, while the possibilities for entertainment centred almost exclusively on the local village pub.⁵ Improving housing too proved to be a serious problem in rural communities as it was in urban centres. Much of the housing in the village was over a hundred years old and though not so ravaged by war bombardment was in a poor state of repair. There was thus considerable room for improvement.⁶

There is no doubt that by the late 1960s some modern conveniences had become available to villagers in line with the GDR's industrial development during the decade.⁷ Furthermore the LPG – particularly where they were the largest local employer – had started playing an active role in organising and funding the construction of better communal facilities and improving housing.⁸ Very often for the least well-off, the LPG represented something of a liberation – there was much to be said for the regular payment of wages, a regulated working day, subsidised kitchens and even the opportunity for holidays. There is no doubt too that many in the 1960s benefited from the social change associated with collectivisation. Greater access to higher education opened channels for new career opportunities and some social mobility. Landless farm labourers were able to achieve new status in the LPG, while women and young people were to some extent granted greater independence as their traditional obligations to the farm and to the household were reconfigured in the LPG. Moreover the bureaucracy and welfare infrastructure which accompanied the expansion of LPGs made a range of new – not strictly agricultural – jobs available in the countryside.⁹ This enabled women to take up positions of not inconsiderable authority and responsibility in a range of roles from the LPG canteens to the LPG bureaucracy.¹⁰ The potentially powerful position of chief

⁵ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grünberg IV 2/2.023/36 Die 5. Tagung des Zentralrats der FDJ am 22. und 23. April 1960, Discussionbeitrag p.90.

⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-344 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Analyse und Probleme der Entwicklung des gesellschaftlichen Lebens in den Gemeinden des Bezirkes 27.3.1972 pp.14-35.

⁷ Merkel I, *Utopie und Bedürfnis Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne 1999) p.353.

⁸ ThHStAW RdB L041313 Referat für Ratssitzung – Genosse Kummer (Experiment) 22.8.1968.

⁹ ThHStAW Bezirksplankommission, Information über die von der Bezirksplankommission für die Bilanzierung der Planangebote AK-Entwicklung...21.3.1967.

¹⁰ Ross, S., Langenhahn D "Berufskarrieren von Frauen" in Hornbostel S. (ed.) *Sozialistische Eliten: Horizontale und Vertikale Differenzierungsmuster in der DDR* (Opladen 1999) pp.147-162.

accountant was increasingly occupied by women in LPG during the 1960s and 1970s. Within the farm itself, there is evidence into the 1970s of women farmers being barred from participation in decision making and discouraged from gaining qualifications and male farmers continued to occupy most of the responsible jobs within the LPG up to 1989. Nevertheless an increasing proportion of women were able to participate in the LPG boards, become brigade leaders or in a very few cases heads of the LPG. Women, for this among other reasons, when interviewed after the *Wende* continued to acclaim the benefits of the collective model. The experience of community, the chance to gain recognition of personal achievement, greater free time and less rigid social control in the village were considered of particular value.¹¹

Nonetheless in most rural communities by the end of the 1960s, the degree of improvement in living standards and working conditions in general terms had by no means been dramatic.¹² The process of separating out and then concentrating crop and livestock production as well as other essential elements of agricultural production (machine repair, building, fertiliser and chemical storage) over a wider area encouraged (indeed required) the centralisation of the facilities for agricultural production and administration in single central villages. These in turn attracted investment in housing and other amenities, beginning in some respects to fulfil the SED's proclaimed intention of matching rural with urban living conditions. However this process left a large number of smaller but by no means obsolescent communities with little prospect of future improvement or even the maintenance of their local services. A few villages were beginning to undergo a process of depopulation losing their status both as settlements and as centres of production. The proportion of people required to work in agriculture was declining steadily during the 1960s owing to technological development. At the same time many young men were leaving the villages thanks to the introduction of military service in 1962, and the prospect on completion of this service of further education and training and access to better jobs in industry. On the whole however the disparity was most clear to villagers themselves in the extent to which living standards in rural communities had failed to improve in comparison to those in towns over the decade.

¹¹ Van Hoven, B. "Women at Work- experiences and identity in rural E. Germany" in *Area* 33.1, 2001, pp.38-46.

¹² ThHStAW SED BPA – Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/214 Abt. Staatsfragen, Einschätzung der Durchsetzung der Aufgaben der vorangegangenen Plenum und vor allem des VII. Parteitages 16.8.1968 p.2.

The quid pro quo of collectivisation and subsequent steps to transform the organisation of agriculture – restricting private production and local independence - had always been the improvement to living and working conditions in rural communities which social and economic transformation would bring. By the end of the 1960s, however a large proportion of those who remained in the agricultural workforce could see no real improvement in the living standard available to them, especially when compared with the conditions for those who worked in industry and lived in towns. Although the incomes of farmers had improved since the early 1960s, there was a consistent sense that they were being underpaid for the amount of time and effort they put in. A comparison with working conditions in industry had long been a problem for those functionaries at the grassroots attempting to quell dissatisfaction among collective farmers and persuade young people to remain in agriculture. Concessions to consumerism and immediate improvements to working conditions which were introduced under Walter Ulbricht and considerably extended under Erich Honecker served often only to highlight the lesser status of agricultural production in this respect.

In 1967 the Secretary for Agitation and Propaganda in the SED *Kreisleitung* in *Kreis Sömmerda* wrote of the damage done to popular opinion of the SED regime by the lack of improvement to working and living conditions. In particular he singled out the consistent complaint among farmers that improvements to working conditions (such as the 5-day week) promised by the VII. SED Party Congress did not appear to include them, especially if they were tending livestock.¹³ Discussion of how in practice to introduce the 5-day week had been under consideration by the agricultural council for some time. In response to a request from the chairman of the *Rat des Bezirkes* for information on how it might be introduced in agriculture at the end of 1965, the head of the *Bezirk* agricultural council was forced to point out essential problems which prevented the 5-day week from being applied to the LPGs. As things stood it was still difficult to find the personnel to give livestock farmers a regular 6-day week let alone anything less. Furthermore with the seasonal variation in agricultural work, 5-day weeks could only be arranged around the peak working periods.¹⁴ The introduction of the fortnightly 5-day week elsewhere in the

¹³ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/A/4.10/092 Genosse Hermann, Sekretär der SED Kreisleitung an Genossen Friedrich, Sekretär der Bezirksleitung, Abt. Agit./Prop 29.5.1967 p.74.

¹⁴ ThHStAW RdB L1075 Band I Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Vorsitzender an den Vorsitzenden des Rates des Bezirks, Probleme, die sich aus der Einführung der 5-Tage Arbeitswoche in der Landwirtschaft ergeben 23.12.1965.

economy provoked complaints during end of year assemblies held in LPG in *Kreis Arnstadt* in January 1966 that agriculture “never gets taken into account when it comes to such social improvements.”¹⁵

During discussion of the new constitution in 1968 the continuing disgruntlement over their living standards and working conditions was made clear by farmers. The commitment in Article 30 of the constitution to provide employment for everyone and allow everyone the freedom to choose their employment - albeit according to the requirements of the economy – sparked new hopes among some farmers that they might be able to abandon their membership of the LPG more easily and take up better paid work in industry. Article 31 of the constitution which guaranteed a right to free time and relaxation to all, provoked some cynicism from LPG members who compared the conditions for those working in industry with the long hours and numerous handicaps faced by farmers in the GDR.¹⁶ Although there had been considerable increases in the amount of machinery available to farmers particularly in the field which alleviated some of the more laborious tasks in agriculture, suitable machinery was not always available or reliable. Root crops in particular continued in many LPGs to be harvested by hand. Moreover those, usually men, who worked with the machinery themselves sustained in large numbers severe physical injury from the new conditions in which they worked. Less manpower may have been necessary thanks to the new technology but not always less individual physical effort from the machine operator.

For those, very often women, who worked with livestock, conditions were reported to be especially hard. Working hours were very long and there was little scope for days off given the shortage of those free to deputise. At the same time, the concentration on improving crop production had forced LPGs on the whole not to invest properly in the construction of new buildings in which to house animals or in the machinery to alleviate the most labour-intensive tasks of tending the stock. The lack of mechanisation in the sheds to deal with the provision of feed and the removal of dung gave the lie to promises of better conditions in the near future. As one woman farmer pointed out at a meeting of women farmers in the Erfurt-Land district in June 1963: “a lot

¹⁵ ThHStAW RdB L1158 Bezirkslandwirtschaftsrat, Information über die durchgeführten Jahresendversammlungen in den LPG im Bezirk Erfurt 12.1.1966.

¹⁶ B-Arch Abt. DDR, DK 1 VA Neu 2846 Landwirtschaftsrat der DDR, Information zu einigen Problemen der Verfassungsdiskussion in den sozialistischen Betrieben der Landwirtschaft 1.3.1968.

is said about new technology but in livestock we work like we did in our great grandfather's time. Especially the mucking out and the fodder transport is so difficult that many women don't want to work in the sheds. And when we ask the men to help us with the heavy work, they'd rather do it all themselves. The newly built animal sheds are often so primitive and so far away from the village. It doesn't help us to make the work easier or to enjoy it either."¹⁷ By the late 1960s improvement had often not been forthcoming.

How seriously the conditions for livestock production had been neglected in LPGs in *Bezirk* Erfurt at the end of the decade is revealed in a report by the veterinary department at the RLN (B) in 1971 which noted serious levels of livestock mortality. In most cases the causes for the unnaturally high number of deaths of animals could be traced directly to the conditions in which they were being kept. An investigation found that in approximately 1 in 7 LPGs and 1 in 3 VEGs "unbearable" conditions - in most cases overcrowding, damp, cold and lack of ventilation in livestock sheds - had caused heavy losses in both old and new livestock sheds. Old buildings were often found to be primitive and not properly suited to the uses being made of them, particularly in terms of the quantities of animals housed in them. Meanwhile new buildings were found to have been left unfinished or shoddily constructed owing to a lack of materials or insufficient funds to pay for them. The conditions in which cattle were kept in a number of LPGs were described as particularly vile. In 13 LPGs it was noted that the holdings were vastly overcrowded resulting in the lamming and suffocation of animals and in 9 LPGs a basic lack of sufficient feed had caused animals to die of starvation. Elsewhere large numbers of cows, bullocks and calves were kept in several small sheds, which had no efficient means of disposing of the quantities of muck and slurry produced. This lay consequently thick on the ground and had contaminated much of the rest of the farm, greatly enhancing the risk of disease as well as creating an unbearable climate in the sheds.¹⁸

The problem of livestock production was in large part down to the limitations placed on the LPGs during the 1960s for the sake of the ideal transition to industrial-scale farming in the future. Little investment had been allowed in the development of new

¹⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA BIV/2/7-497 Information über die durchgeführten Kreisbäuerinnenkonferenzen 14.6.1963 p.83; IV/A/2/2-38 Protokoll der Bezirksparteiaktivtagung Landwirtschaft am 17.12.1963, Referat Genosse Thieme, Stellv. Leiter des Büros für Landwirtschaft p.22.

¹⁸ ThHStAW Abt. Veterinärwesen, Bericht zur Konzeption für die Untersuchung der objektiven und subjektiven Ursachen der Tierverluste 16.8.1971.

facilities until it was clear how this could be done on a scale and with a degree of specialisation which allowed the most rational use of resources and provide the greatest level of productivity possible. In the meantime the numbers of livestock had nonetheless to be maintained in order to ensure proper use could be made of the facilities once they were built. In a number of LPGs Types I and II where the average age of the members was now close or beyond retirement age and where it had not been possible to alleviate some of the burdens of private livestock production because of the lack of space in collective buildings, LPG members were beginning to despair of the future.¹⁹ In one LPG Type I, the members commented on the impossibility of their situation: “in the immediate future we’re not allowed to build and we’re not allowed to merge with an LPG Type III...” they complained “...where and how are we supposed to contain the livestock production from old people’s farms?”²⁰ The abandonment of the dual price for produce from livestock in 1969 placed the LPG Type I on an equal footing with LPG Type III making it necessary to introduce new measures to control the reinvestment of profits in developing industrial-scale agriculture. Given the straitened economic circumstances in the GDR as a whole and the ongoing conflicts within agriculture itself however, it is not surprising that they were not universally welcomed.²¹

During 1970 new regulations were announced to establish in LPGs greater controls over the balance between consumption of profits in pay and bonuses and accumulation for investment.²² The RLN (K) and the State Bank for Agriculture and the Food Industry were given greater powers to encourage cooperative investment and to force LPGs, particularly the few remaining LPG Type Is to fund the formation of industrial-scale production facilities. The financial burden met with a negative response from farmers particularly in those districts where LPG Type Is still existed in large numbers. A number of chairmen in *Kreis Sondershausen* suggested that the new system punished farmers for having been

¹⁹ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2973 DBD Bezirksvorstand, Abt. Parteiorgane, Wertung des weiteren Verlaufs der Diskussionen zur Vorbereitung des Perspektivplanes 21.9.1970.

²⁰ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2973 DBD Bezirksvorstand, Abt. Parteiorgane, Weitere Kurzeinschätzung über Verlauf und Ergebnisse der Diskussion in MV und in der politischen Massenarbeit zur Vorbereitung des Perspektivplanes und zur weiteren Anwendung des ÖSS 10.9.1970.

²¹ Roesler, J. *Zwischen Plan und Markt. Die Wirtschaftsreform 1963-1970* (Berlin 1990) p.147.

²² Siegfried Kuntsche refers to such measures to centralise control over investment and accumulation as an erosion of the autonomy which the LPG had enjoyed under the NÖS. The loss of independence bound up with the loss of incentive in turn he suggests was a severe blow to LPG members’ traditional identities as farmers. Certainly it was a turning point for the remaining members of the LPG Type I. Siegfried Kuntsche et al (eds.) ‘Die Umgestaltung der Eigentumsverhältnisse und der Produktionsstruktur in der Landwirtschaft’ in D. Keller, et al. (eds.) *Ansichten zur Geschichte der DDR Vol. 1* (Bonn 1993) pp.191-211 here pp.206ff.

successful.²³ In particular in Heiligenstadt there was a general feeling among Type I members that: “we’re are being scrubbed dry by the state – now they want to take every last thing away from us”.²⁴ In a report by the DBD in Heiligenstadt in July 1970 the new economic regulations were considered by some even to spell the end of the existence of the collective farmer “now they’ll pull the rope taut for us”.²⁵ Similar responses such as “now they even want our trousers” or “there’s no point in working” were found in other districts in relation to the new restrictive regulations on pay, bonuses and social security contributions in the LPGs.²⁶ Leading DBD members in functionary positions in the LPG were found to be actively highlighting the negative impact of new economic regulations on the immediate net income of the collective farmers rather than concentrate on their political and national economic rationale. Some mid-level cadres had even gone so far as to threaten to withdraw from the LPG if they themselves were forced to accept any less pay than they received before the regulations were introduced. Such moves to restrict pay for those working in agriculture seemed merely to add insult to injury given that it seemed to many farmers that they had never before been so badly supplied with spare parts by industry.²⁷

When the economy seized up and bottlenecks in supply throughout industry and agriculture began to occur towards the end of 1969 and during 1970 collective farmers and villagers in general felt themselves to be bearing the brunt of the shortages which arose. Bottle-necks in industry had begun to compromise the supply of consumer goods to the population, particularly in rural areas which were always hit worst by a breakdown in distribution and supply. In the run-up to elections in 1970 in *Kreis Sömmerda*, among the main causes of popular dissatisfaction in the villages recorded by the SED *Kreisleitung* were the lack of basic amenities and ongoing supply shortages of certain key goods. Complaints on the lack of street lighting and the poor quality of roads, were accompanied by complaints on the lack of coal deliveries and failure of rubbish collection services.²⁸

²³ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-184 Abt. Parteiorgane, Kurzinformation Nr.54 22.6.1970 pp.142-144

²⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-165 Abt. Parteiorgane Kurzinformation 57/70..13.7.1970 p.491.

²⁵ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2973 DBD Kreisvorstand Heiligenstadt, Information, 17.07.1970.

²⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-165 Abt. Parteiorgane, Information aus der operativen Tätigkeit..30.7.1970 p.513.

²⁷ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2973 DBD Bezirksvorstand, Abt. Parteiorgane, Parteiinformation 11.8.1970.

²⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/211 Abt. Parteiorgane, Wie wird die Lage in den einzelnen Orten eingeschätzt? 19.2.1970 p.162; Rat des Kreises, Kreiswahlbüro, Bericht über die durchgeführten Rechenschaftslegungen in Vorbereitung der Volkswahlen sowie über die Eingabenbewegung p.182.

Such complaints provoked some serious criticism and self-criticism within the SED at all levels in the party hierarchy with regard to the management of the economy and public relations. A report on the situation by the SED *Kreisleitung*, Sömmerda put the blame for the country's economic problems on the inadequacy with which complex economic reforms had been implemented and the failure of the party to communicate effectively with the people. Lack of decent housing, shortages of goods available, lack of plan fulfilment all backed up general public scepticism with regard to the SED's claims of socialism's superiority. The state's sudden inability to supply the everyday goods which had previously been available and the feeling too that the people's complaints were not being properly listened to had, the report suggested, led to a sense of resignation that "things will not improve". In the state apparatus the opinion was reportedly widespread that: "there's no point talking about future development. It's not clear now and it keeps changing anyway." What confidence there was in the SED regime to provide stability and security as well as economic and social improvement was badly undermined.²⁹

In the run-up to the VIII. SED Congress in 1971 criticism of the manner of implementation of SED agricultural policy began to mount. There were calls for the RLN (K)s to be more clear and conscientious in their advice and support for the organisation of farming. Better training was also demanded for LPG chairmen so that they would be given the know-how to conduct cooperative crop production. This fitted too with calls for the independence of the LPGs to be given greater respect, particularly as far its own finances were concerned. The amount of control exercised by the Bank for Agriculture and Food Industries over LPGs' use of funds and access to credit had created the impression among some collective farmers that they had no control over their own money. In particular complaints were made that the bank demanded too high an interest rate on loans to the LPG and used the threat to raise rates to force LPG chairmen to check or advance the development of the LPG.

Although no direct attacks were made on Ulbricht's decisions with regard to industrialising production, it was clear that agriculture had suffered from the failure of his economic reforms. LPGs were being forced, it seemed, to carry the burden of the difficulties of other sectors of the economy. As a result of price reform in industry, the

²⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/148 Abt. Agit./Prop, Gesichtspunkte eines Beschlusses des Politbüro vom 5.10.1970, Zu inhaltlichen Problemen der politischen und ideologischen Arbeit und ihre Wirksamkeit 10.11.1970 pp.49-66.

cost of materials and equipment purchased by the LPGs had risen considerably. A vastly higher proportion of LPGs' profits was thus being spent on equipment - which was not always of good quality – while farmers were being compelled to cap their incomes.³⁰ Particularly at a time of organisational transition for LPGs, the inability to work out a plan for their future development which was based on secure supply of tools, machinery, fertiliser and building materials was clearly a serious problem with far reaching consequences. Discussions on plan fulfilment reported on by the DBD *Kreisverband* in *Kreis* Gotha revealed the degree of irritation growing amongst farmers. Exhortations to farmers to be more efficient must have been like a red rag to a bull. One farmer reportedly commented: “You lot talk about clever leadership, and yet there are no spare parts here for the machines, no tyres for the trailers – everywhere you look something is missing. Give it a rest with the leadership and the planning.”³¹ If this system of economic administration was to continue, farmers suggested, then the LPGs must be allowed to employ lawyers for themselves so as to advocate their interests against industrial enterprises which had failed in recent years to keep their contractual obligations. The failure with little or no notice to supply spare parts for machinery, fertiliser, disinfectant, veterinary equipment, and protective work clothing had all contributed to poorer working conditions and lower production levels in agriculture, for which farmers now sought redress.³² The head of crop production in Griesheim made his expectations no less clear in June 1971 – “we expect that as a consequence of the VIII. SED Party Congress, all the relevant sections of the economy will give us better support, especially those who produce agricultural machinery. One can't get rid of the feeling that in several places citizens are sitting around actually doing the work of the enemy and getting away with things by coming up with all sorts of excuses.”³³

Concerns over the manner in which agriculture was being treated was not just an issue for the collective farmers and LPG functionaries but also resonated throughout the agricultural administration of party and state. It was certainly not the intention of leading

³⁰ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30/ IV A 2/2.023/2 Analyse der Vorschläge, Hinweise und Kritiken der Werktätigen in der Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft in Vorbereitung des VIII. Parteitages der SED 10.5.1971 pp.116ff.

³¹ SAPMO B-Arch, DY60/2958 DBD Kreisverband Gotha, Abt. Parteiorgane, Parteiinformation, 2.4.1971.

³² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/B/2/5-410 DBD Bezirksvorstand an den Sekretär für Landwirtschaft der SED Bezirksleitung, Sozialistischer Wettbewerb nach dem Beispiel Tuchheim 15.2.1971 p.229-234; DBD Bezirksverband an die SED Bezirksleitung, Vorschläge unserer Mitglieder aus MV, differenzierten Beratungen und persönlichen Aussprachen 4.5.1971.

³³ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2958 DBD Kreisvorstand Arnstadt, Einschätzung der Meinung der Mitglieder unseres Kreisverbandes zum VIII. Parteitag der SED. 24.6.1971.

SED functionaries responsible for agriculture to see productivity in agriculture reduced. They were well aware that low morale among collective farmers sustained by difficult working and living conditions was not conducive to the successful development of agricultural production. It was even more clear to leading agricultural functionaries in Berlin that agriculture was in danger of being made the financial scapegoat for difficulties in industry or construction. As a result Grüneberg was active in lobbying for agriculture to be given greater protection from increases in the prices for industrial products and for greater recognition to be given to the achievements of agriculture since collectivisation. It was argued that comprehensive investigation into the impact of industrial price policy over a number of years on agriculture pointed to a number of negative consequences which had hampered agricultural development, particularly towards the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. Most tellingly it had seen production costs raised across the board in agriculture by approximately 14.1%. Furthermore fluctuating prices as a result of the industrial price regulatory system developed as part of the latest economic reforms had caused such administrative grief and hampered cost control so much that what usefulness it had was heavily outweighed by the expense it caused. Inflation in prices for construction materials and the exorbitant prices charged for new machinery acted as natural disincentives for the development of industrial-scale agriculture.³⁴ The major departure established by VIII. SED Party Congress was thus the reorganisation of the economy along more conservative lines. A degree of central control and more extensive centrally defined plans replaced the complex systems of economic planning and incentive established by the various reforms of the Ulbricht era.

Continuities

With the VIII. SED Party Congress in 1971 which marked the final transition of power from Ulbricht to Honecker, there was little immediate change in socialist agricultural policy. The gradual development of ever more comprehensive cooperation in crop production was still at the heart of the plans for reaching the next stage in agriculture and

³⁴ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV A 2/2.023/50 Hausmitteilung, Dr. Feil an Genossen Grüneberg, Stellungnahme zur "Analyse der Preisentwicklung wichtiger Produktionsmittel für die Landwirtschaft" 28.6.1971; Information für Genossen Kiesler, "Im Zusammenhang mit den Untersuchungen zur Preispolitik und den dazu notwendigen Berechnungen...." 26.7.1971; Information über weitere Manipulationen der Staatlichen Zentralverwaltung für Statistik und des Amtes für Preise bei der Darstellung der Industrie- und Baupreisentwicklung, 28.7.1971; Untersuchungen zur Preispolitik – Teil Landwirtschaft 24.8.1971.

rural society's social and economic development. The confirmation of the party line, despite the apparent transfer of power however did remove much of the remaining reticence in the hierarchy of both party and state in their attempts to implement policy. The paralysis of the previous year and a half was to some extent relieved by the clear official sanction given at the VIII. SED Party Congress to the continuation of cooperative crop production. The path and pace of development continued nevertheless to vary considerably from LPG to LPG. There was certainly no sudden uniform enthusiasm nor centrally driven mass agitation campaign for cooperation or for the separation of crop and livestock production.

A *modus vivendi* between farmers, the leading cadres in the LPGs and the district functionaries of party and state could not be established everywhere with ease. The same arguments still remained pertinent to local protagonists disputing the value of cooperative relations with one another. There was thus considerable continuity in the immediate experience of farmers and LPG functionaries on the ground. Despite the apparent significance of Ulbricht's loss in authority within the SED hierarchy, the continuing presence of Gerhard Grüneberg as the leading force in the Politburo on agricultural matters ensured that the vision guiding the ultimate social and economic transformation of agriculture in the GDR remained as before. After the uncertainty of the last years of Ulbricht's period in office, there is no doubt that a degree of initiative and dynamism returned to socialist agriculture, though the impact was neither immediate nor universal.

In September 1971, there was general acclamation in the party meetings of the LPG BPOs in *Bezirk* Erfurt of the decision made to supply the LPGs with extra sources of fodder to balance out the problems caused with recent difficult weather.³⁵ This was a much needed measure and brought relief to several LPGs facing another difficult year feeding their livestock. It also took the pressure off the existing cooperative crop production units to be immediately very efficient in exceeding their plan targets. However Honecker could not claim the plaudits for a general improvement in living conditions in rural communities. Improvements on the grain front were balanced by problems on the potato front. In *Bezirk* Erfurt, difficulties with the potato harvest saw a public relations disaster for the regime in general and in particular for state functionaries in several rural

³⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/101 Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der MV – Monat Oktober 8.11.1971 p.356.

communities. The need to reclaim potatoes from the cellars of LPG members in order to ensure there were sufficient numbers available in the shops brought with it some lasting bad blood. As a representative of the trade organisation in Leubingen pointed out in September 1972: “We all remember all too well, what a political outcome the reclamations from the population had last year. Quite apart from the effort which we and the affected farms had with loading and unloading, we can’t allow ourselves another such dilemma again.”³⁶

The concluding report by the *Bezirksverband* of the DBD preparing for the election in November 1971 pointed to continuing disgruntlement among its members, despite the seemingly positive overall changes expected from Honecker’s replacement of Ulbricht. The continuing lack of a sufficient supply of inorganic fertiliser in the *Bezirk* caused some farmers to voice the suspicion even that ‘economic sabotage’ was being committed. The response to the extra grain which was distributed to the LPGs also was not wholly positive. Farmers could not see why they had had to wait so long to receive such grain subsidies, complaining that “it is wrong to deliver the grain only once the animals have lost lots of weight, as it will lead to lower weight increase results.”³⁷ People’s Petitions (*Eingaben der Bevölkerung*) in the second half of 1971 sent to the ZK agricultural department showed that for farmers across the GDR not all the supply problems in agriculture could be solved overnight. A lack of spare parts continued to render new machines useless provoking widespread complaints.³⁸

The RLN (K)s in different districts too did not immediately improve in their ability to solve the problems of the struggling LPGs/KOGs for which they were responsible. In conjunction with the VIII. SED Party Congress in 1971, criticism of the state apparatus for agriculture – particularly with regard to the development of cooperation – had prompted investigation into the functioning of the agricultural councils and their production staff. A report by the SED *Bezirksleitung* on the working practices of the RLN (B) as well as the RLN (K)s in early 1972 noted in typical party jargon “great differentiation” in the quality of the work done at all levels in the hierarchy of state administration. As usual however, it

³⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/C/4.10/073 Sekretariat, Protokoll über die Kreisparteiaktivtagung am 25.9.1972 27.9.1972 Diskussionsbeitrag Gen. Freistauer, HB Leubingen pp.65-66.

³⁷ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2958 DBD Bezirksvorstand, Abt. Parteiorgane, Ergänztender Abschlussbericht über die Arbeit unserer Partei in Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Wahlen am 14.11.1971, 17.11.1971.

³⁸ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/24, ZK der SED, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Eingaben aus der Bevölkerung 25.1.1972.

was the staff of the RLN (K)s who were found to be severely in need of both more political education and more technical training.³⁹ Despite the clear approach set out at the VIII. SED Party Congress, the RLN (K)s were not in a position to take action to resolve all divergent trends on their territory with any speed. There were still competing ideas about how and how quickly further specialisation and industrialisation of agricultural production should take place.

The idea of establishing wholly separate administration for crop and livestock production even in the long term still provoked in 1971 an openly negative response from some collective farmers. In one LPG, an SED member argued that if cooperation should be continued at all, then livestock production should be part of the cooperation too.⁴⁰ Pursuing such a plan was rejected on the grounds that it would lead effectively to the formation of a Grand LPG based on the merger of the collective farms in the KOG. Come April 1972 and the RLN (B) had however still to report that success with regard to the gradual reinvigoration of cooperative crop production was still being overshadowed by widespread desire among farmers to form such large mixed crop and livestock farms. In *Kreis* Erfurt-Land, the LPGs based in Andisleben, Grossrudestedt and Kerspleben had all begun to expand through mergers. Between the 3 of them, they occupied more than one fifth of the district's agricultural land. Similar tendencies were also noted in LPGs in *Kreis* Eisenach and Bad Langensalza.⁴¹ Thus while in *Kreis* Sömmerda and *Kreis* Apolda more than 70% of land was being farmed in a cooperative unit in 1972, the rest of the *Bezirk* was by no means so far advanced. Only 20% of land was being farmed in this way in *Kreis* Worbis and *Kreis* Sondershausen further to the north where LPG Type Is in particular had remained resistant to cooperative crop production. In the *Bezirk* as a whole, 72 cooperative crop production units (*Kooperative Abteilungen Pflanzenproduktion* or KAPs) administered 45% of the farm land, leaving more than half to be farmed by LPGs either independently or in less formal cooperation with one another.⁴²

³⁹ ThHStAW RdB L041299 SED Bezirksleitung, Abt. Landwirtschaft an das Sekretariat, Ergebnisse der Arbeitsgruppe zur Untersuchung der Arbeitsweise der Produktionsleitung des RLN des Bezirkes Erfurt und der Produktionsleitungen einiger Kreise 9.3.1972.

⁴⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/101 Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der MV – Monat September 5.10.1971 p.344.

⁴¹ ThHStAW RdB L041299 RLN (B) Information an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung Erfurt der SED über den Stand und die Entwicklung horizontaler Kooperationsbeziehungen in der Pflanzenproduktion des Bezirkes Erfurt 3.4.1972.

⁴² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-344 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Analyse und Probleme der Entwicklung des gesellschaftlichen Lebens in den Gemeinden des Bezirkes 27.3.1972 pp.14-35.

Nonetheless in the course of the next two years, the proportion of farm land officially administered by a KAP increased steadily. Concerted efforts by the SED *Kreisleitung* and the RLN (K) ensured LPG cadres took steps to establish stable cooperative crop production within the KOGs, overcoming rivalries between the individual collective farms and carrying out sufficient consultation with their members before radical steps were taken which had a direct impact on working conditions.

Reconstituting Cooperation

There were still tendencies among agricultural functionaries to seek to win the plaudits for achieving rapid advances in the LPGs and KAPs and in the process they neglected to gain the approval of the collective farmers beforehand. Nevertheless the message of the 10th ZK Plenary Session in April 1969 regarding the sovereignty of the individual LPG and the importance of collective democracy continued to be emphasised by the GDR's leading agricultural functionaries. In January 1973 in a document prepared for Erich Honecker's discussions with the 1st secretaries of the *Bezirke*, Gerhard Grüneberg's office outlined the current position on agriculture. The document suggested optimistically that there was now unity from top to bottom among all who worked in agriculture in the GDR on the correct policy. To maintain this unity however, it re-emphasised the importance of a slow process of transition and real discussion with the farmers themselves before greater concentration and specialisation of production was introduced. In order for socialist agricultural policy to be successfully put into practice, it was necessary above all not to undermine the special – traditional - commitment of farmers to the production process. The continuing existence of LPGs, with their structures of inclusion and participation, and the element of proprietary ties to the land for which they stood in theory, if not entirely in practice, were essential to this policy, as they maintained farmers' "moral and material interestedness".⁴³

The reorganisation of working patterns, competences and responsibilities in the LPGs as a result of the formation of a separate crop production unit entailed potentially serious upheaval for many LPG members and raised serious doubts about the nature of their future employment: primarily where and with whom they would be working, and on what basis they would now receive an income for the labour and land they had contributed.

⁴³ SAPMO B-Arch DY30 IV A 2/2.023/1 Büro Gerhard Grüneberg, Grüneberg an Honecker, Material für die Beratung mit den 1. Bezirkssekretären 24.1.1973.

During the SED district party activists' assembly for agriculture in September 1972, a representative of the KOG Sömmerda spoke of the need to strike the balance between taking into account the wishes of the individual LPG member and moving forward with formation of a separate crop production unit: "We will take on no member, who hasn't been spoken to; we will take on no member where a signed delegation agreement has not been presented and we will accept no cadre files where the questionnaire has not been filled out."⁴⁴ Prior to the establishment of the KAP Stotternheim/Grossrudestedt in *Kreis* Erfurt, for example, careful attention was paid to ensuring the personal objections of the individual members were aired and dealt with before the KAP was set up. Resolutions were passed in the members' assemblies of the LPGs and discussions held with members in their brigades as to who was to be delegated into the KAP and on what basis they were to be paid.⁴⁵

After the VIII. SED Party Congress, LPG cadres certainly felt themselves constrained by the need to proceed with developing cooperative relations in line with SED policy and state pressure, and accepted therefore the necessity of forming a KAP. They remained however no less keen to avoid any suggestion that they had failed to protect the LPG members' interests, and sought initially therefore to relinquish as little control over LPG finances to the KAP as possible. The question in particular of how to bring about the fair sharing of the profits of the cooperation, given the varying inputs of the LPGs, was at the heart of discussions in the cooperative councils. The leadership of the LPG Tunzenhausen for example had to admit in a meeting in January 1972 that: "the members are sceptical, they want to enjoy the fruits of their labour, as now the construction work on the Tunzenhäuser territory as well as the land improvement and the construction of paths have been completed. Tunzenhausen" he went on "does not want 100% cooperation as this will just get the dispute started again, especially as far as the sharing of profits is concerned." With each LPG having different resources, there was considerable contention about how these resources could or should be shared and balanced in the division of profits. As a

⁴⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/C/4.10/073 Sekretariat, Protokoll über die Kreisparteiaktivtagung am 25.9.1972, 27.9.1972 Referat des Genossen Heckmann, Kooperation Sömmerda p.58.

⁴⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-356 SED Kreisleitung Erfurt-Land, Information über den Stand der Bildung der KAP Stotternheim/Grossrudestedt...1.3.1973 p.83.

consequence LPG chairmen insisted on a certain amount of the financial organisation continuing to be run via the LPGs themselves.⁴⁶

With the formation of a KAP within a KOG initially often only slight changes were made to the conditions under which collective farmers worked. Thus in the majority of cases where a KAP had been officially formed this initially did not in fact entail any massive reorganisation of production. Most often the field brigades were divided along territorial lines, such that one or at the most two LPGs functioned as a subsection of the KAP. As a result collective farmers could continue to work in their home area. Given that each LPG often continued to receive the produce which yielded from their own fields and used most of their own machinery too, there was little radical changed involved in forming a KAP.⁴⁷ The opinion: “What grows on the territory of the LPG must belong to the LPG” continued thus to be prevalent particularly in those LPGs where large investments had been made in recent years in producing certain special crops such as hops and types of fruit. This opinion was also present particularly in those LPGs which had long had better yields on their fields than their neighbours.⁴⁸ Conflicts on questions of sharing profits and resources within the KAP had the potential to be highly disruptive where no unified system of paying all the KAP’s employees had been worked out. Attempts to set up a KAP in the KOG Grossbrembach were seriously undermined by mutual suspicions between LPG members. Tractor drivers from the LPG Grossbrembach were found to have agreed to the return of machines and apparatus to the individual LPGs in the KOG on the basis that the other tractor drivers were irresponsible with the machines and that the other LPGs were living off the back of their hard work. They felt they were being “continually duped”. In response the chairman of the LPG Vogelsberg argued that his members had been done out of 250,000 Marks during the sharing of profits, being forced to pay a work unit rate of 9,50 M compared to the 11M paid in the other LPGs. Furthermore the

⁴⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/C/4.10/171 Abt. Landwirtschaft, LPG Koop. Sömmerda, Protokoll der Beratung der Vorsitzenden und Parteisekretäre mit Vertretern der Kreisleitung der SED und der Produktionsleitung des RLN. p. 4.1.1972 pp.1-3.

⁴⁷ B-Arch Abt. DDR, DK I VA neu 2464 Ministerium für LFN Abt. Wissenschaftliche Führungstätigkeit und Inspektion, Bericht - Erfurt, 1972.

⁴⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/200 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Stellungnahme zum vorliegenden Bericht der Produktionsleitung über den Stand der Entwicklung der Kooperationsbeziehungen in der Landwirtschaft 11.10.1971 p.252.

development of cooperative crop production had meant the end of his LPG's lucrative line in poppy production.⁴⁹

Despite the occurrence of such disputes, over the course of 1973, continued pressure from the SED *Kreisleitung* and the RLN (K) on LPG chairmen ensured new KAP were formed and existing KAPs overcame their difficulties. Active support was given to the cooperative councils to ensure steps were taken to ensure the constituent LPGs in the KAP were placed on an equal footing and a uniform system of payment was established for KAP workers. The RLN (K) helped the members of the cooperative councils set out a plan for establishing a unified level of work units through a unified set of work norms and system of incentives across the constituent LPG, aiming thereby to prevent the sort of disputes which had proved so divisive in the past.⁵⁰ By March 1973 in approximately half of the existing KAPs unified work norms had been introduced.⁵¹ The resolution of essential financial questions lent a degree of confidence to collective farmers faced with the prospect of working in the KAP. The idea of cooperative crop production was no longer dismissed out of hand. As long as the incomes of the LPG members were protected and there was confidence in the efficiency of the new structure, the KAP appeared to receive greater acceptance among LPG members. The step to cooperative crop production was now positively compared with the step from private to collective farming:

“Everything new has to get properly settled in. 1960 during the formation of the LPG, there were people who could already see their downfall. But everyone has developed since then and no-one has been ruined.”⁵² In the KOG Buttstädt, the formation of KAP had repeatedly failed since 1969 for various reasons, including supposedly the reluctance of LPG leaders to organise one properly, in the face of hostility from collective farmers. Having in the course of 1972 refused to accept “a ramshackle KAP”, by 1974 sufficient pressure from the RLN (K) had been brought to bear on the KOR and sufficient preparation and consultation of LPG members had occurred for their resistance to the KAP to be dropped.

⁴⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/200 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Fragen zur Entwicklung der Abt. Kooperative Pflanzenproduktion der KOG Grossbrembach undated p.283.

⁵⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-356 RLN (B), Betriebswirtschaftlicher Beratungsdienst, Einschätzung der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung der Kooperation Greussen 23.2.1973 p.33.

⁵¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-356 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Handmaterial zur Information zum Stand der Entwicklung der kooperativen Beziehungen zwischen den LPG,....27.3.1973 p.144.

⁵² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-356 SED Kreisleitung Erfurt-Land, Information über den Stand der Bildung der KAP Stotternheim/Grossrudstedt...1.3.1973 p.83.

A New Structure for Agriculture – A New Context for SED Authority

During the early 1970s considerable transition was taking place in many of the LPG Type Is in the *Bezirk*, which had up until this point successfully guarded their independence. It was becoming increasingly apparent to members of LPG Type Is that they would not be able to continue in this way for much longer. Where the financial hardship had not yet forced LPG Type Is to merge with their neighbours, the RLN (K) were bound to take action to end the anomalous existence of the remaining LPG Type Is in the *Bezirk*. Merger with a neighbouring LPG Type III was still often a bitter pill to swallow. *Eingaben* received by the ZK Agricultural Department during the 3rd quarter of 1972 contained several from members of LPG Type Is complaining about the level of contribution they were required to pay the LPG Type III to ensure there was no loss of capital funds per hectare after the farms had merged. Sums of between 2,500 and 3,500 marks per hectare were felt by those Type I members with few animals left to offset this sum to constitute a crippling burden.⁵³ However there was by the early 1970s considerably less will among the collective farmers to continue to maintain their independence than there had been in the previous decade. For the considerable proportion of LPG Type I members who were approaching or had even surpassed retirement age, there was some relief in the prospect of not having to struggle on fulfilling state demands for increased production. An analysis of LPG Type Is in 1972 had already identified the extreme age of their members as reaching crisis levels.⁵⁴ For the rest of the remaining Type I farmers attempting to hold on to independence appeared increasingly futile given the now clear direction of SED policy towards separate intensification of crop and livestock production, and was likely only to bring further financial penalties. Merger or transfer of livestock into a collective herd and participation in cooperative crop production increasingly seemed therefore the only viable option for these LPG members. In a few cases the prospect of merger was mitigated by the fact that those farmers who wished it were sometimes allowed to maintain an extended number of livestock privately for a certain amount of time beyond the date of the

⁵³ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/24 ZK der SED, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Eingaben aus der Bevölkerung im III. Quartal 1972 19.10.1972.

⁵⁴ SAPMO B-Arch DY30 1609 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Brief an Genossen Kiesler von Genossen Ewald, Analyse über einige Hauptprobleme des gegenwärtigen Entwicklungsstandes der LPG der Typ I.

merger.⁵⁵ By January 1974, the number of animals held in LPG Type I/ IIs had been dramatically reduced as a result of mergers and switching to a higher LPG Type. In *Bezirk* Erfurt only 2.8 % of cattle, 2.3% of pigs and 1.4% of sheep were now being held in the remaining 49 LPG Type Is.⁵⁶

The merger of LPGs and the formation of the KAP had brought with it a “changing of the guard” in agriculture, providing opportunities for SED members to be established in positions of influence over wider areas of production. Specifically in *Bezirk* Erfurt a new generation of functionaries trained in the latest socialist agricultural theory and methods and largely loyal to the SED had taken positions as heads of KAP.⁵⁷ Obstruction of steps towards the formation of separate crop and livestock production by LPG cadres had often been put down by the SED *Kreisleitungen* to the fears of the LPG functionaries themselves to be demoted as a result. There were certainly a number of cases in *Bezirk* Erfurt in which DBD members were considered to be hostile to the development of cooperative crop production. The political constellation of the chairmen involved in the KOG Buttstädt was weighted 4:3 in favour of the DBD compared to the SED and this was believed to be among the main causes for the slow development here of a KAP.⁵⁸ Whether or not LPG chairmen who were members of the DBD really did obstruct the development of the KAP for fear of losing their position, the concentration of crop production in the KAP provided an opportunity for the SED to assert its dominance over agriculture.

During a training week for leading members of the DBD in *Kreis* Nordhausen, an instructor from the SED announced in a speech that the position of head of the KAP would only go to SED comrades. When challenged about this comment afterwards, on the basis that the head of the DBD in *Bezirk* Erfurt, Willy Grandetzka had only recently suggested the opposite, the SED member responded that Grandetzka would have to revise his opinion too.⁵⁹ In the KOG Grossengottern for example changes to cadre positions with the creation of the KAP in August 1972 was the cause for discussion among DBD members. The new administrative construction of the KAP was described by DBD

⁵⁵ D. Gabler *Entwicklungsabschnitte der Landwirtschaft in der ehemaligen DDR*, (Berlin 1995) p.227; Statistisches Jahrbuch – Bezirk Erfurt Teil I p.173.

⁵⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-344 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Faktenmaterial zum Stand und zur Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft des Bezirkes 13.12.1974 pp.85-96.

⁵⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/3-164 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Material für die Mitarbeiterberatung am 27.8.1973 p.184.

⁵⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/C/4.10/171, Abt. Landwirtschaft Information über die Aussprache in der Kooperation Buttstädt zur Entwicklung der Kooperation in der Feldwirtschaft, 12.1.1972, pp.4-9.

⁵⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/15-517 SED Bezirksleitung, Abt. Landwirtschaft Aktennotiz p.39.

members who considered themselves to have been demoted compared to their former positions as a “great changing of the guard”. Some even asked to join the SED instead, if this would allow them to hold their functions.⁶⁰ By the end of the year, complaints were still arriving from DBD members at Grandetzka’s desk. In Grossengottern the KAP head had allegedly told a member of the DBD that he had no chance of being sent to qualify himself at the LPG school in Meissen in the near future, as all SED members would be sent there first and SED members would be the ones occupying the mid- and top- level functions in the future.⁶¹

With the settlement of the status of all but a few LPG Type Is, the proportion of land in the *Bezirk* under the control of LPGs actively participating in cooperative crop production was considerably increased. By 1974 the switch to KAP had been almost completed across the *Bezirk*. There were now 115 KAPs in the *Bezirk* with an average size of 3,033 hectares.⁶² Moreover steps were being taken to revolutionise the conditions of production. Many of the KAPs had already begun to be restructured towards specialised production of particular crops over large areas. In the process working conditions began to change for those LPG members who had been delegated into the KAPs. With the development of a different layout of fields and crop rotation, the KAPs began to organise their work brigades on more than the simplest territorial lines, combining some territorial brigades with other task specific brigades whose members might come from various LPGs and which might be deployed in various parts of a KAP.⁶³ This was a radical departure for the organisation of agricultural production and signalled a considerable change in the status of the agricultural workforce, seeming to break the traditional connection of responsibility between the individual collective farmer and the land and livestock of his LPG.

Conclusion

By the mid 1970s, the basic elements of a new stable context in which the SED leadership might seek to exert its authority over agricultural production at the grassroots

⁶⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/15-517 SED Kreisleitung Mühlhausen an die Bezirksleitung Abt. Parteiorgane, Information 30.8.1972 p.30.

⁶¹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/15-517 SED Bezirksleitung Information an den Bezirksvorsitzenden der DBD 21.12.1972 p.42.

⁶² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-344 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Faktenmaterial zum Stand und zur Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft des Bezirkes 13.12.1974 pp.85-96.

⁶³ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-356 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Handmaterial zur Information zum Stand der Entwicklung der kooperativen Beziehungen zwischen den LPG,....27.3.1973 p.144.

had been established in *Bezirk* Erfurt. There were still numerous obstacles to overcome in the organisation of the relationship between crop and livestock production, however a significant milestone had been reached. With the demise of the LPG Type I, the last remnants of the concessions necessary to private production had been removed. With the formation of the KAP, any tendencies towards the Grand LPG and the pursuit of the traditional pattern of mixed livestock and crop farms had been abandoned.⁶⁴ At the same time, the process of professionalisation of the agricultural workforce in line with specialisation of production was beginning to make itself felt. Just as the number of agricultural workers had begun to reach a steady level in balance with the machinery and technology available, so a steady ratio of farmers attained a basic qualification in socialist agricultural theory and methods. Perhaps most importantly in the mid-1970s the SED as a party was able to achieve a more consistently dominant status within the structures of agricultural production on the ground. Although the SED BPO continued to vary in their ability, the proportion of party members among collective farmers reached unprecedented levels. More importantly still, the party had established itself firmly among the leading local functionaries determining the manner in which policy was implemented at the front line of farming. A stabilisation of SED authority was thus beginning to take place at the grassroots of agricultural production.

⁶⁴ some elements of the debate for and against the Grand LPG are discussed in: Langenhahn D., "'Wir waren ideologisch nicht ausgerichtet auf die industriemässige Produktion.' Machtbildung und forcierter Strukturwandel in der Landwirtschaft der DDR der 1970er Jahre" in *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* Heft 2/51, 2003 pp.47-55.

CHAPTER 8

Stabilisation and Stagnation

“If the fodder is good and the earnings are right, there’ll be no negative discussions...”¹ (A comment by a board member in the LPG Buttstädt prior to a merger with the neighbouring LPG Essleben and the formation of a KAP)

After a long period of transformation marked by conflict and compromise, by the mid 1970s the terms on which the SED leadership communicated its authority to the agricultural workforce at the grassroots had, it seemed, ceased to be racked with conflict and uncertainty over the fundamental direction of agricultural development. In this more stable context, steps could be taken to consolidate the administrative separation of crop and livestock farming and the process of intensification and specialisation of production in agriculture rapidly, without the overt hostility to transformation among collective farmers which had characterised previous years. The district state administration and LPG cadres could now be relied upon to be consistent in communicating SED policy to collective farmers, acting with the backing of a more substantial and in most cases more efficiently run SED party organisation than had been the case five years previously.² With the terms of their participation in agriculture thoroughly transformed, collective farmers had no choice, but also often no desire, but to pursue their interests as far as possible in the context of the new structure of agricultural production, rather than in spite of it. By the same token however, a heavy burden of expectation now rested on the SED leadership to prove the worth of the socialist modernisation of agriculture in improving the incomes and the working conditions of the agricultural workforce.

Early signs that the structures now in place to regulate agricultural production at the grassroots, primarily the relationship between crop and livestock farms, were prone to imbalances, did not however bode well for the future. As early as 1971 a small number of leaders of advanced KAPs had already begun to assert a degree of independence, motivated by the financial incentives to specialise in the production of a particular crop. In

¹ KAS Rat des Kreises Sömmerda 2907 Protokoll über die Vorstandssitzung der LPG Buttstädt am 13.9.1974, 16.9.1974.

² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7 – 348 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Aufstellung der KAP ohne GO 12.11.1975 p.2; SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzungen der Entwicklung der Kampfkraft der GO in den einzelnen Pflanzenbaubetrieben des Kreises 11.1.1977 p.6.

so doing they had proved themselves unheeding of the concerns of LPG chairmen for the damage to the supply of livestock feed which such specialisation might entail.³

Establishing effective relations between crop and livestock farms continued to be a problem throughout the decade. By the 1980s general economic decline aggravated the failure of agricultural functionaries in the district state and party apparatus and the LPG/KAP to regulate increasingly chronic imbalances in the relationship between crop and livestock farms. Arguably with the completion of the separation of crop and livestock production and the concomitant reconfiguration of the agricultural workforce, the structures of agricultural administration had stabilised. Nevertheless the terms on which stability had been achieved, could not protect against and indeed exacerbated grounds for discontent among collective farmers in the coming years.

Consolidation and Conflict

During the second half of the 1970s, throughout the *Bezirk*, KAPs began to merge with one another increasing the size of individual field plots and expanding the potential for large expanses of monocultural production. Along with this process of expansion and specialisation came further steps to develop the work organisation within the crop production farms. Brigades were increasingly organised according to specific tasks, rather than purely specific areas of the farm, in an attempt to concentrate and deploy, in the most rational way, the skills and machinery available. This entailed bringing to an end the connection between the individual farmer and a particular territory. What remained of the intimacy of understanding of local conditions, the inherited relationship between the farmer and his land and his locality were deemed in practice increasingly irrelevant, at least on the scale which had hitherto been the case.⁴ However by this stage there were no reports of serious hostility to the new arrangements. Although the configuration of brigades and the prospect of working on distant territories was not always a welcome change, there was little to be gained by opposing it. Greater quality and quantity of yields were now more widely seen by collective farmers to be primarily attainable via processes which occurred on a grand and necessarily supra-local scale. Having accepted the dilution

³B-Arch Abt. DDR, DK I VA neu 2464 Ministerium für LFN, Probleme der Führungstätigkeit im Bereich der Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft im Bezirk Erfurt, 1971, undated.

⁴ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-344 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft Information über die Jahresendversammlung der LPG Kranichfeld, Kr. Weimar am 21.1.1972, 27.1.1972 p.6.

of their rights to participate in the running of the farm and their rights to local self-determination, as a result of the expansion of the KAPs, there however was the expectation that at least incomes would be steadily improved.⁵

Deployment of manpower and use of modern machinery, the systems of spreading fertiliser and pesticides, irrigation and drainage and the specialisation in particular cultures could occur most efficiently with as little territorial division within the crop farm as possible. As a consequence of the growing irrelevance of old boundaries between collective farms and the greater unity and coherence of the KAPs, however, the relationship between the leaders of KAPs and their nominal superiors, the chairmen of the LPG became increasingly anomalous. As the structures and work organisation of the KAPs ceased to bear direct correlation to the constituent LPGs, the on-going sharing of administrative competence between KAP leaders and LPG leaders was increasingly difficult to uphold. The KAP was in theory still a subordinate structure to the LPG within the context of the cooperative community and hence was financially bound to the constituent collective farms. Yet as the primary producers of the feed on which several LPGs relied and as the financially dominant institution in any cooperative community, this subordinate position appeared to be increasingly anomalous in practice. LPG chairmen had official seniority and an obligation to ensure that the LPG as an institution retained its dominant position and as a livestock farm was well served by the KAP. KAP leaders however had to balance the not always equally influential demands of the various LPGs in their vicinity with the demands of the state as well as seeing to their own financial security. Consequently relations between chairmen of LPG and the leaders of KAP could easily become fractious.⁶

The institutions which had grown up out of cooperation between LPGs, including the KAP, were officially not to be seen as independent structures, and were not to undermine the fundamental importance of the LPG as the dominant administrative structure through which agriculture was to be regulated on the ground and the interests of

⁵ ThHStAW RdB 036208 RLN (B) Produktionsleitung für Land- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Bericht über die Ergebnisse der JHV, JEA 1974 sowie der Betriebsplanung 1975 der VEG, LPG, GPG und ihren kooperativen Einrichtungen 6.3.1975.

⁶ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1516 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Analyse zu einigen wichtigen Problemen der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung in der Pflanzen- und Tierproduktion 21.12.1973 p.235 In Bezirk Erfurt in particular the KAP Greussen, Kreis sondershausen, Leubingen, Kreis Sömmerda, Sonneborn, Kr. Gotha and Förtha in Kreis Eisenach were accused of making such premature applications for recategorisation. An additional problem was the break down in the use of members' assemblies for all members of the LPG with the establishment of the KAP. As a consequence the principles of collective democracy were seen to be suffering.

collective farmers were represented. However it was clear, particularly as KAPs merged and established a complex internal structure and work organisation, that although the KAPs were themselves merely transitional institutions, they would sooner rather than later become de facto independent of their constituent LPGs. Uncertainty over how and when this would occur made for still more uneasy relations as the heads of the KAP sought to cut the ties of dependency on the LPGs as quickly as possible and LPG chairmen sought to maintain their authority.

On the one hand LPG chairmen were accused of attempting to abuse their senior position, pettily refusing to advise the KAP or to provide additional workers during peak times and more seriously of ensuring the prices for feed and services arranged between LPG and KAP were fixed in the favour of the livestock farm. Equally some KAP heads were found to be deliberately trying to limit the influence of the LPGs over the KAP, and to develop the KAP into an independent specialised farm as soon as possible, without due consideration of the feed requirements of the LPGs, or the impact this step might have on the development of livestock production. That these tendencies were not being satisfactorily arrested at district level is apparent from the content of a document prepared for a discussion between Gerhard Grüneberg and leading agricultural functionaries in the *Bezirksleitungen* in 1974. KAP heads were still found, he warned, to be disregarding the needs of the LPGs which they were obliged to respond to and satisfy.⁷

The step from KAP to independent LPG for Crop Production (*LPG Pflanzenproduktion* or LPG P) occurred at different rates from area to area. Some model specialised LPG P had already been set up in *Bezirk* Erfurt after the VIII. SED Party Congress.⁸ In the course of 1975 steps began to be taken in a small number of KOGs in *Bezirk* Erfurt to establish several more LPG Ps and thereby impose some order on the strivings for independence among some KAP heads.⁹ Those collective farmers who had technically been delegated from the LPGs into the KAP received thereby a new status as members of a wholly separate new LPG P. In the process their rights as a member of an LPG to participation in the running of the collective farm in which they were employed

⁷ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/24 Material für die Beratung mit den Sekretären und Abteilungsleitern für Landwirtschaft der Bezirksleitungen am 29.7.1974.

⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA – Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/200 GO der SED der 4 LPG der Kooperation Weissensee, Vorlage für das Sekretariat der Kreisleitung und der Bezirksleitung der SED 26.11.1971 p.258.

⁹ SAPMO B-Arch ZK der SED, Abt. Parteiorgane DY30/IV B 2/5/459, Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Information an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung über die Bildung von LPG und ZBE (P) und die Zusammenschlüsse von LPG, GPG und KAP mit Beginn des Jahres 1977, 18.10.1976

was reasserted, as was their right to a household plot which in some KAPs had been denied. Parallel to the LPG Ps, LPGs for Livestock Production (*LPG Tierproduktion* or LPG T) formed out of what remained of the original collective farms: the cooperative livestock production facilities which had been set up between LPGs or the remnant livestock production in the individual LPGs themselves. During the course of the next four years KAPs began gradually to transfer to LPG Ps, and LPG Ts formed with varying degrees of specialisation. Although the formation of LPG Ps and LPG Ts resolved the ambiguous status of delegated LPG members and set the relationship between heads of crop and livestock farms on a new footing in theory, it did not resolve in practice all of the problems of the new structure of agriculture.

Ostensibly there were key criteria which the KAPs had to satisfy before their leading functionaries could submit a request to change their status to that of an LPG P to the RLN (K) and the SED *Kreisleitung*. These criteria were a mix of technical and administrative conditions designed to ensure that the transition to full independence for crop production could be justified in terms of administrative efficiency as well as productivity for both crop and livestock production, and would be carried out with the due signals of support from the constituent collective farmers. A due scale of plantations had to be established, with a due complexity of work organisation ensuring the most rational approach had been adopted to intensifying production. At the same time, the LPG Ps had also to demonstrate their ability to meet the needs of the livestock farms in the area. In theory the transition of LPG to LPG T and the KAP to LPG P rectified thus some of the problems which had developed between the KAPs and the LPGs.

In practice however there remained serious problems in balancing the relationship between crop production and livestock production, given the difficulties of coordinating the interests of LPG Ps and LPG Ts in the context of a shortage economy. Ideally the formation of large-scale crop farms with an advanced system of work organisation and specialisation of particular cultures would enable sufficient overall increases in productivity such that increased consumer demand could be met, levels of agricultural imports could be reduced and the demand for feed from ever larger livestock holdings satisfied. With greater productivity in livestock production, it was hoped that excess production over and above domestic demand could be used to gain valuable foreign

currency as exports. For this ideal situation to be realised however productivity from crop production farms had to increase steadily matching the demands of increasing numbers of livestock held in the *Bezirk*. Such regular increases proved in practice elusive given the competition across the East German economy for essential materials and financial investment.

Amid a worsening economic situation in the GDR during the later 1970s, the relatively low status of agriculture within the SED's investment priorities severely tested the efficiency with which the relationship between separate crop and livestock farms was regulated. In such straitened circumstances, neither the leading cadres of the LPGs and KAPs nor the agricultural functionaries of the state administration in the *Bezirk*, nor indeed the SED *Kreisleitung* were effective in preventing some serious imbalances in the distribution of funds and resources to livestock farms. As a consequence working conditions, particularly in the smaller livestock farms, failed to improve and in some cases steadily worsened. Not only was there a shortage of feed available to feed the animals and maintain productivity, the rising costs facing LPG Ps and KAPs were passed on to livestock farms reducing still further their ability to fund improvements to production facilities and working conditions.

Inadequate Industrialisation

Given the state of agricultural development at the end of the 1960s, continuing the project of creating and then sustaining truly modern industrial production in agriculture during the 1970s could not be achieved cheaply. It required heavy initial investment in construction for storage and preparation of crops, as well as for intensive livestock holding. However it also required continuous investment to provide the buildings with heat and light and sustain a regular supply of machinery and vehicles as well as the fuel to run them. In addition there were numerous other expenses such as chemical fertiliser and pesticides for crops as well as medicines for the livestock which were prone to mass outbreaks of disease when kept in large numbers in such close proximity to one another. Where the money to pay for the transformation of agriculture would come from was no easy matter.

Despite the expense, there was a general reluctance in the SED leadership to risk popular discontent by passing on some of the cost of production to the population in

higher prices for foods. Motivated by the spectre of the June 17th 1953 uprising as well as the loss of face sustained by the SED leadership during the shortages at the end of the Ulbricht era, Honecker remained consistently opposed to cutting price subsidies for the population. At the same time, the limits to which resources could be gained from collective farmers themselves appeared to have been reached after the austerity of the 1960s. Particularly once the last vestiges of private production in the LPG Type Is had been subsumed into the LPG Type IIIs, there were no obvious resources left in private hands to exploit. As a result LPGs depended very heavily on state subsidies on the prices they paid for machinery, fuel and other resources as well as loans to sustain the development of agricultural production. Given the limited extent of the GDR's own natural resources, the cost of the raw materials on which the development of agricultural production (and indeed GDR's industry in general) relied, was heavily dependent on the balance of world trade. During the 1970s, as prices on world markets rose, the cost of production for industry and for agriculture in the GDR rose rapidly, forcing the SED leadership to increase the financial burden on the LPGs themselves, while reducing imports and increasing exports of valuable commodities.

Under better economic conditions, it had been expected that crop production would become still more efficient using intensive methods to achieve dramatic increases in yields. At the same time, the construction of intensive livestock sheds were expected to minimise feed requirements while raising productivity. However by the start of the 1980s the development of such efficient industrial production had proved impossible as growing costs made sustained investment in agriculture prohibitively expensive. Without this sustained investment however, the prioritisation of resources made for a very uneven and often mistaken industrialisation of agriculture. Working conditions for a large proportion of collective farmers did not improve, leaving the SED leadership to suffer from a clear indication of its fallibility.

The End of 'Realistic Plans'

As the sector of the economy whose potential for further mechanisation and rationalisation was greatest, it had long been incumbent upon agriculture to accept steady and considerable reductions in its workforce. The departure of rural youth to work in industry

had long been encouraged in order to fulfil the ever increasing demand for labour. Provision of a suitable budget for machinery was thus vital to replace the lost manpower and improve working conditions for the rapidly ageing workforce. On the one hand LPGs could in theory spend more on machinery and construction if their profits were improved as a result of improved labour productivity. On the other however regular increases in the incomes of the remaining collective farmers were essential to harmonious relations between LPG members and functionaries in the LPGs and the district party and state administration. The austerity of the last years of the Ulbricht era could not be repeated. Additional state subsidies alongside the investment of the LPGs' own capital were thus necessary to sustain the cost of both increasing incomes and the purchase of machinery. More importantly the state had to ensure the machines and materials required by agriculture were available for purchase. At the end of 1974 Gerhard Grüneberg had already begun to warn Gerhard Schürer at the State Planning Commission that the supply of combine harvesters was not keeping pace with the reduction in the agricultural workforce as a result of old age and the recruitment of young people to industry. A major side-effect of this imbalance between machinery and a reduced labour force was the requirement that farmers continue to do much manual labour and put in large numbers of overtime hours and forego weekends. Long-awaited and long-promised improvements in working conditions remained thus noticeably absent, even if incomes continued to improve. As Grüneberg pointed out to Schürer: "the situation is such that we are seriously behind in carrying out socio-political measures for male and female collective farmers."

In this situation Grüneberg was adamant that an increased export of agricultural machinery when it was badly needed at home could only ultimately result in a reduction of agricultural production. This in turn, he argued, would have a damaging effect on working conditions and serve only further to undermine the morale of farmers and with it the legitimising claims of the SED regime.¹⁰ A month later in a memorandum for Erich Honecker, Gerhard Grüneberg pressed his point home further about the need to improve the provision of machinery for home agricultural development. The successes of the years following the VIII. SED Party Congress (1971) he suggested had been the result of a return to working with "more realistic plans". Such had been the drive for economic

¹⁰ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/33 Bemerkungen in der Beratung bei Genossen Schürer am 24.10.1974.

efficiency and rationalisation during the period of economic reform under Ulbricht, that impossible advances in productivity had been demanded of agriculture given the investment made available. In contrast in the first years of Honecker's period in office, investment had been sufficient to enable real advances in productivity. This had to be sustained. Unless the steady supply of machines and spare parts continued, Grüneberg now argued, it could not be expected of farmers that they continue to increase production.¹¹ Despite his pleas however it was clear that agriculture occupied a relatively lowly position in the GDR's economic priorities as decided by the SED's leading economic functionaries such as Günter Mittag and Gerhard Schürer. As long as the current balance in the world economy made it necessary for the GDR to limit its imports and maximise its exports, agriculture would have to make do with what it had already been provided with.

Problems with the supply of essential resources on world markets particularly oil had an immediate impact on agriculture in the GDR. In January 1975 instructions were issued by the *Rat des Bezirkes* to the heads of all agricultural enterprises to reduce the levels of fuel used compared with the previous year with the aim of reducing consumption by 20%. The amount of fertiliser available to agriculture in some districts also dropped by 5-6% since the previous year. This could not be helped, it was argued, owing to the enormous increase in the price on the world market which had limited the level of imports possible.¹² In February 1975 a discussion was held in the *Rat des Bezirkes* outlining some of the economic problems facing the GDR in the coming year. Of primary concern was the fact that the prices for essential raw materials were increasing more rapidly on the world market than prices for finished products in which the GDR primarily specialised. In order to deal with this the GDR would have to increase exports to maintain a balance of trade, reduce imports of raw materials as far as possible and additionally increase its national debt. Consequences of this problematic situation for rural communities were numerous as supplies of both consumer goods to the population and machines and materials to agriculture were likely to be badly affected.¹³

¹¹ SAPMO B-Arch Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/16 Grüneberg an E. Honecker 29.11.1974.

¹² ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/C/4.10/183 Demokratischer Block, Protokoll über die Kreisblocksitzung am 6.2.1975, Referat Genosse Lindenlaub p.78.

¹³ ThHStAW RdB L041322 RLN (B) Probleme in Auswertung der Dienstberatung vom 3.2.1975 beim Vorsitzenden des Rat des Bezirkes 5.2.1975.

With many farms in the midst of upgrading their production methods to an industrial-scale with greater mechanisation, the knock-on effect of high oil prices on the cost and availability of transport, construction and machinery was a severe blow. With some LPGs and KAPs forced to delay construction of larger livestock sheds, land improvement schemes or the purchase of modern machine systems, the gulf in the productivity and working conditions which existed between different KAP as well as between LPG even within single districts remained severe.¹⁴

As the KAPs had merged and expanded to some extent a similar process of consolidation had occurred in livestock production, however there had been much less rapid, much less consistent progress on this front by the mid 1970s. Remaining LPG Type Is had been subsumed into the administration of the LPG Type IIIs even where no large-scale livestock sheds had been constructed. Neighbouring LPG Type IIIs too merged with each other combining their resources, with the goal of specialising when possible in a single branch of meat or dairy production or livestock rearing. However in only a small number of cases had intensive livestock holding sheds been constructed by the mid 1970s. The rest of the LPG Ts were at vastly different stages of development either in their facilities or degrees of specialisation. By 1977, although some concentration of production had occurred in most LPGs in *Bezirk* Erfurt with the renovation or extension of livestock sheds, a large proportion of livestock continued to be kept in multiple small buildings which lacked even basic labour saving machinery for feed distribution or manure removal.¹⁵ The number of livestock production units employing a large number of workers was thus relatively few. Most people employed in livestock production worked in small numbers in several sheds, where conditions had rarely changed significantly since the 1960s.¹⁶ There was thus an increasingly obvious stratification of financial and productive status and with them political clout between livestock farms.

Suggestions by DBD members on how to organise things more effectively in August 1975 pointed out that realistic plans had to be worked out as to how much fodder was actually produced and how much was likely to be consumed by concentrated

¹⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/C/4.10/183 Demokratischer Block, Protokoll über die Kreisblocksitzung am 6.2.1975, Referat Genosse Lindenlaub p.78.

¹⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/17-541 Rat des Bezirkes, Information an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung über die Arbeits und Lebensbedingungen der Genossenschaftsbäuerinnen, die in alten herkömmlichen Ställen der Tierproduktion arbeiten 5.11.1976 p.95.

¹⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-348 SED Bezirksleitung, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Untergliederung der Betriebe der Tierproduktion nach der Anzahl der Beschäftigten 1.11.1977 p.66.

livestock holdings, at the expense of other livestock holdings in the locality.¹⁷ Between 1975 and 1976 a number of new large-scale industrial livestock holdings were opened in *Bezirk* Erfurt among them two 12000 place pig fattening centres in Hermstedt and Uthleben. As a consequence other LPG Ts were to be deprived of a large part of their share of high protein feed, which in turn would be bound to reduce their productivity. To add insult to injury, when LPG in the *Bezirk* managed to produce additional mixed feed on the assurance that it would be distributed among the traditional LPG Ts, a delay in establishing the mixed feed producing plant in Ebeleben meant that this too was swallowed up, leaving the *Bezirk* with an overall deficit of 23 kilotonnes of mixed feed.¹⁸ The lack of feed available in 1975 for livestock production was also a desperate problem for the LPG Schwerstedt, as the chairman explained in a meeting with the head of the BPKK in April 1975. With the creation of a bull rearing station in Strausfurt the balance of feed distribution in the cooperation had been upset resulting in serious shortages for other livestock farms provided for by the KAP. Not only was there a serious lack of roughage as well as protein feed, there were also no reserves available.¹⁹

In the mid 1970s the problems facing agriculture were considerable but by no means insurmountable. There was still room for further increases in production via further mechanisation, concentration and specialisation of production. By 1976 the potential of such large specialised production units such as the KAP and LPG P to increase production levels had been proved in *Bezirk* Erfurt with increases in the gross production of 2.3 billion marks. At the same time the level of productivity per head of the workforce had also increased by 34.2% on the previous year even though the level of wages had risen by 11.6%. However it could not be overlooked that the costs incurred had increased at a faster rate than the increase in gross production. The price of construction, as well as the price of fuel, materials and machinery had gone up while administrative costs had also increased considerably.²⁰ Certainly industrial-scale production was capable of producing more, but given the economic climate and the cost of essential materials on the world markets this increased production was not more cost efficient.

¹⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/17-541 DBD Bezirksverband, Vorschläge zur Lösung von Entwicklungsproblemen und Aufgaben in der Landwirtschaft des Bezirkes Erfurt 20.8.1975 p.101.

¹⁸ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1705 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, SED Bezirksleitung an Genossen Kiesler 1.12.1976 p.183

¹⁹ ThHStAW RdB L041322 RLN (B) Sekretär der Produktionsleitung an Genossen Schröter, Information über die Aussprache in der Bullenmastanlage Strausfurt zur Futtersituation 23.4.1975.

²⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/C/2/7-344 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Bericht über die Verwirklichung der Beschlüsse des VIII. Parteitages...Jan 1976 p.192.

Nonetheless as the 1970s progressed, LPG cadres and agricultural functionaries in the districts sought to consolidate the administrative separation of crop and livestock farming and increase the specialisation and concentration of agricultural production in line with SED policy. In the process, however the chronic vulnerability of this separation of administrative competence to economic decline became more and more apparent, resulting in a seriously flawed industrialisation of agriculture.

Problems of Scale

The decision to form separate LPG Ps and LPG Ts was confirmed at the IX. SED Party Congress in 1976, precipitating the transfer of more KAP to LPG P status and an even more radical expansion of individual farms. Prior to the formation of an LPG P it was considered necessary in some cases for neighbouring KAPs to merge in order to produce a sufficient scale and degree of specialisation of production to warrant new status as independent units. At the end of 1976 5 KAPs submitted plans to become LPG Ps. At the same time 8 KAPs merged to become 4 KAPs and 48 LPG Ts merged to become 21 LPG Ts. The size of the LPG P/KAP formed varied from district to district, with those in *Kreis Sömmerda* all over 5000 hectares, those in *Kreis Worbis* all under 3000 hectares and those in *Kreis Eisenach* a mixture of these two size brackets. KAPs in the flat lands could more easily justify merger on the grounds that it enabled the formation of large continuous fields on which single crops could in theory be most efficiently harvested.²¹ However the sheer size of these farms presented their own difficulties.

With the expansion of the LPG Ps and LPG Ts to such sizes, individual collective farmers role in decision making was heavily diluted. They were no longer in a position to judge for themselves easily whether or not the farm was being run correctly. In any case they were subject to a much more dominant SED presence in the LPGs than had previously been the case, which tended to subdue and limit the expression of divergent opinion. LPGs were now run exclusively by highly trained, politically loyal cadres.²² As a

²¹ SAPMO B-Arch ZK der SED, Abt. Parteiorgane DY30/IV B 2/5/459, Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Information an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung über die Bildung von LPG und ZBE (P) und die Zusammenschlüsse von LPG, GPG und KAP mit Beginn des Jahres 1977, 18.10.1986.

²² Following the issuance of the new model statutes in 1977, 41 new LPG P were formed from KAP. 78% of the chairmen of these LPG had a university and 22% a technical college education. 31 of the 41 chairmen were also SED members, 6 DBD, 3 CDU with only 1 cadre with no party membership whatsoever. SAPMO B-Arch ZK der SED, Abt. Parteiorgane DY30/IV B 2/5/479, Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Information an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung über die Schritte der weiteren gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung von LPG, GPG, KAP und ZBE im Jahre 1978 17.10.1977.

consequence, however, it seemed that LPG members were beginning to abdicate responsibility for the success or failure of the farm to which they belonged. In theory the right to participate in decision making via the members' assembly or the LPG board as well as the continuing right to a household plot had enabled the individual LPG member to maintain his traditional understanding of his profession as a farmer and thus his motivation to do well ought in theory to rest on more than avarice. In practice LPG chairmen were forced to rely more and more on raising incomes to sustain the efficiency of the workforce.

An overview of farmers' attitudes toward agriculture in the *Bezirk* concluded that the socialist farm had comprehensively demonstrated its superiority over traditional farming. However it also pointed out that there was an unhealthy reluctance among LPG chairmen to limit the levels of income claimed by their members. Some managers reportedly had adopted the attitude that: "the main thing is making sure the money's good, then the farmers will go along with everything".²³ Such comments in some sense broke a taboo. Notionally the transformation of agriculture had occurred without undue damage to farmers' special status as owners and guardians of the land. It also showed up a serious handicap to organising cost-efficient agriculture.²⁴ Even as the LPGs failed to reduce other production costs, wage bills too were bound to increase.

The rate of growth of production was thus being outstripped by the rate at which money was being spent. In 1979 an overall increase of 2.1% was made in gross production. This was however exceeded by a 2.4% increase in costs, which was compounded by an increase in the wage bill by 1.6% since 1978.²⁵ By 1979, the grand scale of crop production established in the LPG Ps and KAPs appeared to exacerbate rather than reduce the problems of rising costs. On the whole *Bezirk* Erfurt was found to be neither especially good nor especially bad in comparison with the other *Bezirke*. Nevertheless here as elsewhere the rising costs of production could quite simply not be matched by an equivalent increase in gross production. Although the level of concentration and specialisation in crop production was deemed to be on the whole

²³ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/D/2/7-477 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung des Standes der ökonomischen Massenagitation und -propaganda in der Landwirtschaft im Bezirk p.20.

²⁴ ThHStAW RdB L041292 Wissenschaftlich-technisches Zentrum der Landwirtschaft des Bezirkes Erfurt, Einige Ergebnisse der Produktionstätigkeit der landwirtschaftlichen Betriebe des Bezirkes in den Jahren 1975-1977.

²⁵ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1541 Information zu wichtigen Ergebnissen der sozialistischen Landwirtschaft im Jahre 1979, 15.4.1980 p.171.

justifiable in terms of the potential for further exploitation of the natural resources in the *Bezirk*, it was becoming increasingly difficult to manage the work required given the shortage economy. With such a large-scale of production, meeting agro-technical deadlines proved increasingly problematic without sufficient supplies of fuel or spare parts for machinery.

In livestock production, mergers appeared too to fail to improve productivity. An essential reason for the merger of LPG Ts was to reduce the cost of management and spread the number of highly qualified cadres more efficiently. Furthermore it was hoped that neglected livestock farms would benefit from better conditions as a result of the mergers. The heads of the new LPGs, like the KAPs, were overwhelmingly SED members in possession of a university or technical college degree.²⁶ In practice however, mergers of LPG Ts often brought neither a concentration of resources, nor better management to livestock farming. With so many production sites spread across several villages, LPG chairmen reportedly found overseeing production particularly difficult.²⁷

Between 1971 and 1978 a total of 37.8 billion marks had been invested in agriculture in the GDR. However from 1975 onwards the decline in manpower in the LPGs and the shortage of machinery available to balance this decline had been noted as a having a negative effect on the rate at which productivity increased.²⁸ A report in 1979 on the problem of maintaining a sufficient workforce throughout the farms in *Bezirk* Erfurt made it clear that here no further reduction could be sustained without a consequent downturn in production capability.²⁹ The lack of machinery was certainly becoming an increasingly frequent topic for *Eingaben* to the ZK agricultural department by 1978.³⁰ In November 1978 the LPG P Bösleben sent an *Eingabe* to the ZK agricultural department to complain about the lack of essential machinery available to them, which had been the cause of disruption throughout the year both for crop production and livestock production. It was particularly galling however that certain machines ideally suited for agriculture

²⁶ SAPMO B-Arch ZK der SED, Abt. Parteiorgane DY30/IV B 2/5/459, Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Information an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung über die Bildung von LPG und ZBE (P) und die Zusammenschlüsse von LPG, GPG und KAP mit Beginn des Jahres 1977, 18.10.1986.

²⁷ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1541 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Tendenzen, Ergebnisse und Schlussfolgerungen aus den 7 Bezirksanalysen. 24.4.1979 p.33.

²⁸ SAPMO B-Arch IV B 2/2.023/2 Büro Gerhard Grüneberg, Anlage: Entwicklungsprobleme der Landwirtschaft bei der weiteren Durchführung der Beschlüsse des VIII. und IX. Parteitag 31.10.1979.

²⁹ ThHStAW RdB L041292 Fachorgan Land-, Forst und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Stand und Entwicklung des gesellschaftlichen Arbeitsvermögens in der Land- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft des Bezirkes Erfurt, 19.4.1979.

³⁰ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Gerhard Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/24 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Eingaben aus der Bevölkerung im II. Quartal 1978 15.7.1978.

tended to be made available to industrial factories first. Furthermore the lack of basic requirements such as spare parts for trucks to transport produce and personnel meant tractors were having to be used for haulage rather than for agricultural purposes.³¹

On average the GDR was producing more per hectare than it had previously. The average gross turn-over in crop production and in livestock production for the years 1974-1978 exceeded that of the years 1969-73 in the GDR as in *Bezirk Erfurt*.³² Nonetheless the progress of agricultural transformation had come at a price which appeared increasingly unsustainable, given the strain under which the East German economy was operating. As the pinch on the economy at large began to be felt, the SED's leading agricultural functionaries in Berlin began to find themselves under increasing pressure from their colleagues to justify the level of financial support received by the LPGs, in particular the balance of price policy between industry and agriculture.³³ In a letter to Honecker at the start of May 1978 Grüneberg described one memorandum attacking the lack of benefit received from high investment in agriculture as "extremely one-sided, tendentious and in several points and figures factually wrong."³⁴ In the face of continuing reductions in the quotas of machinery being made available to the LPGs during the late 1970s, the SED's leading agricultural functionaries in Berlin could only continue their calls for investment in agriculture to be sustained in order to balance the decline in the workforce. In particular it was argued there was insufficient money being planned for agriculture even to maintain their original levels of machinery, let alone expand. Unless alternative economic decisions were made, it was predicted that after a period stagnation, production levels would drop.³⁵

³¹ SAPMO B-Arch Büro des Genossen Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/24 LPG P Bösleben an das ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft 23.11.1978.

³² SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1541 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Tendenzen, Ergebnisse und Schlussfolgerungen aus den 7 Bezirksanalysen. 24.4.1979 p.33.

³³ In April 1978 Bruno Kiesler – head of the ZK's agriculture department – wrote to Gerhard Grüneberg complaining about a set of suggestions for the future economic development of agriculture which he had been asked to co-sign by the head of the department for planning and finance in the ZK. These documents he maintained contained evaluations of developmental questions in agriculture which were clearly marked by the tendency to contrive to provide evidence that in the development of agriculture too much had been and was continuing to be invested with little positive benefit. Many of these evaluations which the statistical office as well as other institutions had been commissioned to produce, Kiesler suggested, contained consciously false representations and one-sided analyses. He went so far as to repeat the attitude of certain people that "for a certain amount of time, certain influential people have been systematically conducting a witch-hunt against agriculture and - as they are connected to agriculture - against certain people too." Suggestions primarily to force agriculture to pay higher prices for industrial goods and to create a fund with which to balance out any excessive investment were due to be presented to the Sekretariat of the ZK a few days later, with the possible intention to have them agreed upon at a time when, Kiesler suggested, Grüneberg would be absent. SAPMO B-Arch IV B 2/2.023/2 Büro des Gerhard Grüneberg, Kiesler an Grüneberg 21.4.1978.

³⁴ SAPMO B-Arch DY30 IV B 2/2.023/2 Büro Gerhard Grüneberg, "Einige wichtige Fakten zum Beitrag der Land- und Forstwirtschaft zur Produktion des Nationaleinkommens der DDR" 22.3.1978.

³⁵ SAPMO B-Arch IV B 2/2.023/2 Büro Gerhard Grüneberg, Kiesler und Grüneberg an Honecker, 31.10.1979.

These fears seem well founded. According to the *Bezirksleitung* in 1978, in *Bezirk* Erfurt an investment of 1 billion marks had been made during the past two years to support the introduction of industrialised farming. Nonetheless there had by no means been a general improvement in the level of yields produced throughout the *Bezirk*. Despite their fundamentally similar terrain and quality of soil, the amount of produce per hectare harvested in *Kreis* Bad Langensalza exceeded that of neighbouring *Kreis* Erfurt-Land for grain by 1.5dt, for potatoes by 20.5dt and for sugar beet by 42dt.³⁶ Analysing the balance of the economic results for agriculture, the *Bezirk* directorate of the Bank for Agriculture and Food Industries found that in 1979 over half the crop production farms in *Bezirk* Erfurt were struggling to sustain development. Increased costs above all for repairs to machinery had compromised the profitability of LPG Ps.³⁷ Moreover in 1979 it was reported that in the majority of LPG Ps and KAPs in the *Bezirk*, problems in the formation of an effective work organisation with fixed work collectives had not been conducive to reducing excessive costs. In 70% of LPG Ps and KAPs, leading functionaries had yet to settle on the correct combination of brigades responsible variously for particular crops, particular tasks or particular areas of the farm. The inevitable consequence of this was the breakdown of effective planning at the brigade level and the impossibility of seriously assessing where costs could be reduced at the front line of production and comparing results between brigades.³⁸

It was however livestock farms rather than the LPG Ps which tended to bear the brunt of rising costs and sinking productivity. In 1978, the lack of feed as a result of the poor grain harvest meant that the demand from LPG Ts could only be met by 2/3 in the *Bezirk* as a whole.³⁹ As a result of shortages of feed and increases in costs, livestock production farms were thought to be in still worse a condition than the LPG Ps in 1979, with little margin for accumulation and thus little prospect of building up the investment necessary to transform the conditions of production.⁴⁰

³⁶ SAPMO B-Arch ZK der SED, Abt. Parteiorgane DY30/IV B 2/5/416, Protokoll der Bezirksleitungssitzung Erfurt vom 12.4.1978, Referat von Genossen Brauner, Sekretär der Bezirksleitung.

³⁷ ThHStAW RdB L043160 Wissenschaftlich-technisches Zentrum Erfurt, Leistungsvergleich der Kreise des Bezirkes Erfurt im Zeitraum der 5-Jahrpläne 1976-1980 und insbesondere der Jahre 1979 und 1980 II. Quartal 1980.

³⁸ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1541 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Tendenze, Ergebnisse und Schlussfolgerung aus den 7 Bezirksanalysen. 24.4.1979 p.33.

³⁹ SAPMO B-Arch ZK der SED, Abt. Parteiorgane DY30/IV B 2/5/416, Protokoll der Bezirksleitungssitzung Erfurt vom 12.4.1978, Referat von Genossen Brauner, Sekretär der Bezirksleitung.

⁴⁰ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/D/2/7-800 SED Bezirksleitung Abt. Landwirtschaft, Information über die MV der BPO der Bezirksdirektion der Bank für Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft am 19.11.1979. p.355.

The Failures of Cooperation

At one level the reason for the continuing divide between LPG Ps and LPG Ts could be found very simply in the absence or inactivity in practice of the administrative structures which were intended to regulate and coordinate the relationship. A document prepared for the office of Gerhard Grüneberg in May 1976 on the future of agriculture, noted that the cooperative councils were in most cases barely functioning. No body existed therefore outside the state administration actively to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship between crop and livestock production was maintained. The state administration appeared however to be unable to broker effective relations between crop and livestock farms.

A particular issue of complaint among the *Eingaben* sent to the ZK agricultural department during 1976 was the desperate need in livestock farms to replace old machinery and renovate livestock holdings in order to improve conditions for animals and humans alike. The lack of funds available to LPG chairmen to pay for these improvements was put down to the failure in particular of the *Rat des Kreises* to regulate the setting of feed prices and ensure there was a sufficient supply of feed for livestock, leaving livestock farms at a serious financial disadvantage compared with the LPG Ps and KAPs.⁴¹ A series of discussions held with farmers working with livestock in 1977 in *Bezirk* Erfurt reiterated these problems.⁴² There appeared however to be little prospect of resolving these complaints for the time being, as LPG Ps and KAPs tended, often with the backing of the *Rat des Kreises*, to extend their plantations of market crops at the expense of their feed crops.⁴³

Certainly in *Bezirk* Erfurt with state approval, essential changes occurred in the use and quality of agricultural land which worked to the disadvantage of livestock farms. Large swathes of land had already been lost during the 1960s to building projects and mining and for the period between 1976 and 1980, it was expected that still more largely high-quality arable land would be lost to building, quarrying and water management schemes among other things. At the same time, there were strong financial incentives for

⁴¹ SAPMO B-Arch Büro des Genossen Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/24 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Eingaben aus der Bevölkerung im IV. Quartal und im Jahre 1976 insgesamt 20.1.1977.

⁴² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/D/2/9.01 Abt. Parteiorgane Informationsbericht Nr.22/77 28.7.1977 p.54.

⁴³ SAPMO B-Arch Büro des Genossen Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/24 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Einschätzung der Eingaben aus der Bevölkerung im IV. Quartal und im Jahre 1977 insgesamt 13.1.1978.

LPG Ps and KAPs to use much of their most fertile land for fruit plantations to meet growing public demand. The replacement of this lost arable land by ploughing less fertile meadow and pasture land however led to a serious overall drop in the productive capacity in the *Bezirk*. Rather than reducing the amount of produce made available for public consumption, the brunt of this drop in productive capacity was born by a reduction in the amount of feed made available for livestock. On the one hand there had been a reduction in the amount of pasture land available. On the other, with large areas specialising in grain and sugar beet and strict quotas on the amount which had to be made available for public consumption, there had been a reduction in the proportion of the yield devoted to providing feed for livestock as well as a reduction in the proportion of the land devoted to growing particular feed crops. While LPG Ps/KAPs met their obligations, the LPG Ts bore the brunt of any shortage. The amount of land available for fodder production per head of livestock dropped steadily between 1970 and 1978 leading inevitably to a stagnation and even a down turn in the productivity of the LPG Ts. Adding insult to injury, stability in the level of yields had clearly yet to be achieved in the major crops, with considerable variations dependent on the clemency of the weather. Given the dependency of livestock farms on their local KAP/LPG P and the latter's balance of priorities, any drop in the annual yield tended to have a directly negative impact on the supplies available to livestock farms.⁴⁴

A meeting of the cooperative council of KOG Sömmerda in September 1977 reveals the seriousness of the situation with which agricultural functionaries were faced in the late 1970s. Although 1,3 billion marks worth of fodder had been imported the situation was still tight. The secretary for agriculture in the SED *Kreisleitung* was reported here upbraiding the LPG chairmen for some mistakes which had led to unnecessary losses. She concluded: "We all know how things currently look at the moment in agriculture. In such extreme situations, we also begin to see some weaknesses, which one otherwise does not normally immediately recognise."⁴⁵

At the end of 1977, the *Rat des Bezirkes* put forward some suggestions for rectifying the problems faced by the LPG Ts. Conditions in the livestock farms were to be

⁴⁴ SAPMO B-Arch DY30 1540 Rat des Bezirkes, Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden für Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Information über die Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft seit 1970, dabei auftretende Probleme und Schlussfolgerungen, 3.10.1978.

⁴⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/D/4.10/167 KÖR Sömmerda, Protokoll über die Beratung mit den Vorsitzenden der LPG am 24.9.1977, pp.42-45.

improved by ensuring that LPG Ps were made to contribute money into a fund to pay for investment in future development. If “unjustifiably high” differences existed in the financial resources of the LPG Ps and the LPG Ts which could be traced back to unfair prices then a financial settlement was to be reached or money contributed into a common fund.⁴⁶ However in 1978 conflicts between crop production enterprises and livestock production over the price, quantity, quality and delivery of fodder and the removal of animal excrement continued to run.⁴⁷ An investigation by the ABI in 1978 into the state of LPG Ts around the GDR noted serious increases in livestock mortality resulting in part from the inability of the district state authorities to ensure the interests of the LPG Ts were taken fully into account by the LPG Ps.⁴⁸

The problems of cooperation between LPG Ps and LPG Ts became more critical as economic problems became more serious. While LPG Ps failed to reach expected targets for increases in production, it was essential that the price for this failure was not automatically passed on to the LPG Ts. However a fundamental lack of common interests between LPG Ps and LPG Ts led to an apparent lack of understanding on the part of the former for the “financial reproduction process” of the latter. With the cooperative councils which were intended to broker good relations between LPG Ps and LPG Ts widely non-existent, there was a tendency for LPG Ps not to give sufficient priority to their partner LPG Ts’ needs. In *Bezirk* Erfurt, although 56.4% of the gross production in agriculture came from livestock production, only 8.2% of the accumulation of capital was carried out by livestock production farms themselves. As a result they remained largely beholden to the crop production farms for sufficient investment to improve the working conditions of their members as well as to rationalise production. With crop production failing to produce sufficient yields and thus unwilling to share their profits with livestock production the potential for an unequal distribution of wealth between crop and livestock production had increased. In the GDR as a whole over 12,000 requests were made for withdrawal from an LPG at the beginning of 1978, an increase of over 1,500 on the year before. The majority of those wishing to leave were employed in livestock production,

⁴⁶ SAPMO B-Arch ZK der SED, Abt. Parteiorgane DY30/TV B 2/5/479, Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Vorlage an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung über die Konzeption zur Durchführung der JHV in LPG, GPG, VEG und ihren kooperativen Einrichtungen 13.10.1977.

⁴⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/D/4.10/149 Abt. Parteiorgane, Bericht über Ergebnisse der JHV in den LPG und Erfahrungen bei der Anwendung der neuen Musterstatute der LPG 09.02.1978 pp.18-21.

⁴⁸ SAPMO B-Arch Büro des Genossen Grüneberg DY30 IV B 2/2.023/61 Komitee der ABI, Information über Kontrollergebnisse zur Entwicklung der Tierverluste in der Rinder- und Schweinehaltung 21.11.1978.

with over a quarter of requests specifically citing poor working conditions in LPG Ts.⁴⁹ In 1980 a similar number made requests to withdraw from the LPGs. More than half of those who made requests to leave LPGs in *Bezirk* Erfurt cited a desire for improved living and working conditions.⁵⁰

With the financial burden passed on to the LPG Ts in the form of excessive charges for feed production and delivery, it was essential that the chairmen of the LPG Ps and LPG Ts who still nominally formed together a cooperative council maintained communication. The failure of these councils to function since the full administrative separation of crop from livestock production, existing on paper only, had led to a complete breakdown in communication. The lack of detailed knowledge of (and perhaps implied also a lack of concern for) the financial position of neighbouring LPGs led inevitably to serious breakdowns in fair relations between farms.⁵¹ In the case of the LPG P and the LPG T Tötterstadt it was found that the cooperative council had in effect ceased to exist by the end of 1979. Attempts to resurrect cooperation between the heads of the LPGs were found to flounder on the rocks of bitter disagreement between them.⁵² Even where they did exist, however, this was no guarantee that it was possible to reach a mutually beneficial agreement.

In November 1976 a meeting of the cooperative council for the KOG Walschleben in *Kreis* Erfurt-Land was held. The essential conflict of interests was played out here between the agricultural cadres in charge of crop production, those in charge of livestock and those in the state and party administrations at district level attempting to coordinate these two sides of production. In response to the planned supply of fodder offered by the LPG P which appeared to fall far short of the amount required, the chairmen of the LPG Ts could only counter: “we cannot recognise this level of fodder production” and “I will sign no contract which does not guarantee fully our fodder supply”. Although there was general sympathy for their position, the chairmen of the LPG Ts were forced to recognise that they would have to accept the contracted level of supply on paper and then seek their own ways to meet their requirements. Given its own obligations, the LPG P could not

⁴⁹ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1610 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Genosse Lindner an Genosse Kiesler, Information über Anträge von Genossenschaftsmitgliedern auf Austritt aus LPG 9.1.1978 p.54.

⁵⁰ SAPMO B-Arch DY30 1469 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Erste Zusammenfassung der Mitgliederbewegung in LPG 1979 30.1.1980 p.180.

⁵¹ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1541 ZK der SED Abt. Landwirtschaft, Tendenz, Ergebnisse und Schlussfolgerung aus den 7 Bezirksanalysen. 24.4.1979 p.33.

⁵² ThHStAW SED BPA 493 SED Kreisleitung Erfurt, Beschluss des Sekretariates vom 23.11.1979 Nr. 372, 13.11.1979 p.13.

improve its offer on the one hand and on the other the *Bezirk* authorities would withhold financial aid from the LPG Ts unless they signed the contract. In the face of this intransigence and the lack of fodder available in the district, there was some desperation among the assembled cadres about where the LPG Ts would find the feed to fill the shortage. At this stage, complaining directly at the ZK in Berlin appeared to be the only possible solution.⁵³

The minutes of a meeting of the cooperative council for the farms based around the LPG P Andisleben, *Kreis* Erfurt-Land in May 1979 reveals some of the basic difficulties facing LPG cadres trying to coordinate production in both crop and livestock farms. With several livestock farms supplied by the LPG P, large central silos had been constructed from which each was to take his agreed amount. While this reduced transport costs for the LPG P, it increased costs for the LPG Ts and raised mutual suspicion as to whether one LPG was not taking more than its fair share of the silage. As this exchange in the protocol of the meeting demonstrates the shortage of feed made for strong competition between LPG Ts:

K. M. (LPG T): “We have to get to the stage where every LPG has its own silo and farms with that”

G. B. (LPG P): “It will continue to be the case that we have a few central silos from which several LPGs collect”

K. D. (LPG T): “There are always LPGs which don’t stick to the agreements”

M. S. (LPG T): “Sort things out in your patch before you go into other people’s”

With the news that the *Rat des Bezirkes* was organising extra silage to be purchased from elsewhere outside the district which would have to be transported in, the chairman of the LPG P made a telling comment: “Actually over there is where the cattle belong. That’s what you were thinking too. This is no situation to be in – you are always hungry and we always get the blame.” In other words, the real problem was that no effective balance had been struck in the *Bezirk* between the quantity of livestock held in any one area and the amount of land which was devoted to providing feed for them.⁵⁴ It had been for precisely this reason that the administrative separation of crop and livestock production had been opposed in the first place.

⁵³ KAS Rat des Kreises Erfurt 1451 Protokoll über die Kooperationsratssitzung, Kooperation Walschleben am 18.11.1976.

⁵⁴ KAS Rat des Kreises Erfurt 1451 Protokoll der KOR Sitzung Pflanzen-Tier-Produktion vom 22.5.1979.

A form of agriculture had been developed which had shown and continued to show its potential for extraordinary levels of yields. However in order to sustain these levels, steady access to machinery, fuel and chemical fertiliser and pesticides were necessary at a reasonable price. As these resources became more scarce, prices rose for crop production making LPG Ps unprofitable unless they in turn passed on their additional costs to livestock production. LPG Ts however suffered too from a shortage of machinery and fuel. Moreover given the cost of feed and the limits to the amount with which they were supplied, LPG Ts found themselves unable to maintain their levels of production, let alone develop the number of animals they kept or the efficiency of the facilities in which they kept them. Without the prospect of progress in the production facilities, there was little hope for improving living or working conditions in those poorer LPG Ts. This had serious consequences for certain villages whose importance as sites of employment and settlement, and thus of commerce was rendered increasingly obsolete. A vicious circle was created and fuelled by the separation of crop and livestock production which could only drive on an unequal differentiation of living standards between communities in the East German countryside.

Rural Development under Honecker

Following the completion of the transition of power at the top of the SED from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker, at the VIII. SED Party Congress in 1971 there was some optimism among farmers and agricultural functionaries alike that a change in course would rectify some of the economic problems which had manifested themselves so clearly in the years before. Reports from the DBD in *Bezirk* Erfurt in November 1971 suggested however that no such improvements had yet made themselves felt. Rather complaints were directed at the growing corruption of the system of supply from industry to agriculture. Spare parts could in fact be obtained, it was rumoured, if one was willing to grease the palm of the supplier. To add insult to injury the black market was reportedly open to inflation – as one DBD member put it: “What one got a few years ago for an extra 20 M note, is only possible these days with an extra 50 M note.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless as greater investment was made in the provision of consumer goods to the population, rural

⁵⁵ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/2958 DBD Bezirksvorstand, Abt. Parteiorgane, Ergänzendes Abschlussbericht über die Arbeit unserer Partei in Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Wahlen am 14.11.1971, 17.11.1971.

communities were able to benefit along with the rest of the population. The sense remained however among LPG members that they were being given less than those who worked in industry, while at the same time the disparities between individual rural communities began to become more pronounced.

As certain villages in rural areas were identified as new centres of the industrial-style agricultural production, so too did the demand for housing in and around them increase. In 1971 the agricultural department of the *Kreisleitung* Sömmerda pointed out that the district agricultural council needed urgently to address the provision of living space in certain key villages and LPGs such as Weissensee, Buttstädt, Kölleda and Straussfurt where the quality and quantity of housing were insufficient.⁵⁶ New housing and materials for renovation were however also desperately required elsewhere too. Not all farms had been supplied with sufficient machinery to reduce the amount of manpower required to keep them productive and with an ageing workforce, holding on to younger members was essential. From the early 1970s onwards solutions to the housing problems in rural areas were sought in encouraging LPGs to support the aspirations of their members to go about constructing their own homes. This was a boon to those who were able to find the resources to do so. Certainly as early as 1971 the mayor of Gernrode cited the positive response of villagers at the announcement of new plans to encourage people to build their own homes in line with the VIII. SED Party Congress.⁵⁷

In 1979 it was reported with some pride that in *Kreis* Sömmerda 17 houses had been built over the course of the last three years thanks to cooperation between the LPGs and the local state organs. Nonetheless considering the size of the problem of housing in rural areas such advances were clearly not sufficient to resolve the issue. There were also now numerous complaints from LPG members unable to gain access to the necessary materials or disgruntled by broken promises of support from their LPG on these matters.⁵⁸ The rural population's conception of their living standards appears to have depended to a large extent on how well they were supplied with material with which to repair and improve their homes. It might well be argued that the pride farming families had felt in

⁵⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/B/4.10/149 Abt. Landwirtschaft, Melkeraussprache in der LPG Weissensee p.146.

⁵⁷ ThHStAW RdB L014597 Bürgermeister der Gemeinde Gernrode, Kreis Worbis, an den RLN (K), Einschätzung der Gemeinde 3.6.1971.

⁵⁸ ThHStAW SED BPA – SED Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/D/4.10/150 Abt. Parteiorgane, Bericht über die Arbeit der Kreisleitung auf der Grundlage des Beschlusses des ZK vom 7.11.1978 pp.21-35.

private ownership of land could at least to some extent be rediscovered in pride in home ownership. This sense of pride was further re-invigorated by attempts to encourage villagers to keep livestock privately. Since the 2nd Plenary Session of the ZK in 1976, all attempts to further limit private holdings were to be countered. Ideologically speaking this was a retrograde step for the SED regime. The social transformation of the last twenty years had been aimed at diminishing the importance of private ownership. Re-emphasising it did certainly provide some solutions to food supply and housing problems and improved the morale of a proportion of the rural population who were able to take advantage. However it also created greater potential for obvious disparity between the prosperity of individual citizens and ultimately created a source of further disgruntlement as shortages of building materials and other resources proved to be more frequent in the 1980s.

During the 1970s agricultural production reached new heights. Technologically it had never been so advanced and the prospects for further improvement appeared to be good. New machinery and methods for crop production and the construction of high-tech production sites for concentrated livestock farming promised to improve efficiency as well as reduce the level of manual labour required in the future. At the same time, the benefits of Honecker's social and economic policy filtered through to the rural population who were able increasingly not only to build their own houses but have access to their own cars, televisions, radios, fridges and washing machines. In practice however by the late 1970s a very uneven industrialisation of agriculture had taken place across *Bezirk* Erfurt, as across the GDR.

In an increasingly unfavourable economic climate, the organisation of farming created by the SED's agricultural policy proved itself too fragile and susceptible to the weaknesses of the planned economy at a time of shortage. Huge efforts continued to be made by farmers and LPG functionaries to maintain standards, despite shortages of essential resources (of machinery, fuel, feed grain) as can be seen from the levels of overtime worked by collective farmers. However by the beginning of the 1980s the prospects for the improvement of productivity and with it working conditions had largely evaporated, while environmental damage caused by an inadequate industrialisation of agriculture worsened.

Conclusion

The second half of the 1970s saw a brave attempt to transform agriculture and with it rural society half fail and half succeed. There is no doubt that the formation of separate LPG Ps and LPG Ts was a radical step towards advanced and specialised production. However the inability of the LPG Ps and Ts to function efficiently in the worsening economic climate and shortage economy demonstrated the fragility of this method of agricultural production in the face of wider economic constraints. Furthermore the failure for LPG Ps and LPG Ts to cooperate with one another and the consequent severe differentiation in the living and working conditions of certain farmers gave the lie to the SED's claims to provide social improvements to all.

In the late 1970s, in the face of such an uneven transformation of agricultural production, DBD members – many of whom occupied positions as mid-level managers in LPG T - called for steps to be taken to reinvigorate the cooperative council.⁵⁹ Two years later, in 1981 the X. SED Party Congress saw an attempt to take heed of these concerns. This congress, which was preceded by the death of Gerhard Grüneberg, signalled a realisation that the current direction of agriculture was not conducive to efficient production given the reality of the economic situation in the GDR. Consequently plans were made to scale back the size of some excessively large individual farms and limit the extent of monocultural specialisation where it appeared to be damaging to production. This slight change in course did not arouse much indignation among farmers and LPG leaders, nor was it seized upon as an excuse to abandon separate crop and livestock production (as had occurred in 1969 at the 10th ZK Plenum). Not only had the proportion of the farming population been reduced and their local coherence and identity as indigenous farmers been negated by modernisation and industrialisation of agriculture, the introduction of industrial labour practices gave them a fundamentally different attitude towards their work and their position in the hierarchy. The most fundamental changes in the position of the farmers with respect to the land, their livestock and their locality had been accepted. Moreover SED and DBD party organisations in the LPGs were better organised than ever and were able to influence the reception of the X. SED Party Congress

⁵⁹ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/D/2/15-575 DBD Bezirksverband an die Bezirksleitung 30.1.1979 p.83.

more effectively. At this stage the ability of the SED leadership to communicate its authority was not seriously in doubt.

CHAPTER 9

Economic Crisis and Popular Dissatisfaction – the Road to 1989

The 1980s began with a more self-critical attitude in the SED hierarchy concerning the previous course of agricultural policy. The arrival of Werner Felfe to replace Gerhard Grüneberg as the leading figure directing SED agricultural policy along with the new course set during the X. SED Party Congress promised some retreat from the worst excesses of the gigantism and over-specialisation of the previous five or so years. It also promised to oversee some efforts to ensure that crop and livestock production were better coordinated in future. Attempts to scale back the separation of crop and livestock production, improve prices for agriculture and encourage private production in the course of the early 1980s had a positive effect in some cases. Price reforms in 1984 certainly went some way to restoring the finances of farms on paper. However they could not alter much the impact of the worsening economic crisis which the GDR was facing by the mid to late 1980s. The financial burden on agriculture continued to be severe, limiting the extent of improvement possible in those farms which had thus far been neglected in terms of investment and seriously handicapping those industrialised farms which relied on fuel, fertiliser and machinery in plentiful supply. Not only did many LPGs find it increasingly difficult to maintain standards of productivity, there was also no foreseeable solution to the problems of running agriculture productively and efficiently given the GDR's economic problems. The conditions under which collective farmers had to work thus became increasingly fraught by crises.

By the late 1980s sustained shortfalls in investment across the economy were having a serious impact on living conditions in rural communities too. Since the completion of collectivisation rural communities had undergone considerable changes, particularly during the course of the 1970s as the industrialisation of agriculture began to have an impact on the pattern of rural settlement, elevating the status of some villages while relegating others. During the 1970s and early 1980s some of the negative impacts of the transformation of agricultural production on rural communities were mitigated by improvements (or the promise of them in the near future) to the standard of living possible in other respects. The distance from the home to the work place may have increased

considerably and the status of the individual farmer within the collective farm might have been diminished, but increased incomes and access to a range of modern conveniences in the home nonetheless were welcome improvements to the standard of living. However those villages which did not become centres of the newly industrialised agriculture were often left behind in the distribution of resources for the improvement of public amenities – transport and road networks, water and electricity supplies. By the 1980s the seriousness of the economic problems facing the GDR limited the potential for making up for this neglect. Popular dissatisfaction at for example the lack of a consistent running water supply could then only be aggravated still further by shortages in the supply of essential goods to villages – which again necessarily were less well supplied than towns. The extent of environmental pollution which had come with the (often incomplete or mismanaged) industrialisation of agriculture and the spread of industry (from 1980 brown coal fired) into the countryside then had a damaging effect on the health of the population as well as the reputation of the SED regime. By the late 1980s there was not only considerable disparity in the working conditions in different sites of agricultural production, there was also considerable disparity in the living conditions in rural communities. Worse still perhaps there appeared to be no immediate potential for improving the situation, as general economic decline and environmental pollution continued to worsen.

Agricultural Reform

In 1981 the future did not look good for agriculture in *Bezirk* Erfurt as in the rest of the GDR. In September that year the agriculture department at the ZK received with dismay the latest demands of the State Planning Commission for a further reduction in the levels of grain imports into the GDR above and beyond the previous target. The SPK intended that by 1985 instead of the 3.1 million tonnes of grain previously planned only 0.5 million tonnes would be imported. As a consequence the amount of grain available for livestock feed from domestic production as well as imports was expected to sink to 20,423 kilotonne grain units. Alongside this quantitative reduction, it was also expected that there would be a qualitative reduction in the feed available with the purchase of cheaper, less nourishing varieties. Under these conditions it seemed unavoidable that the level of meat and dairy production would have to be scaled back. There was an obvious agenda in the

agricultural department's presentation of a worse case scenario. No department relished the prospect of cuts to the budget it was allocated. Nevertheless a drop in grain imports was certain to have a far-reaching effect.

Given such grain shortages, it made sense to allocate resources to those farms which produced most efficiently at the expense of other less efficient production sites. It was not however entirely clear which of the GDR's farms were the most efficient producers. In theory the modern concentrated production facilities were the most productive. This however did not always prove to be the case in practice, given their fuel consumption and problems with disease as well as waste disposal. Closing or reducing the capacity of such facilities was tantamount to a public admission of economic crisis and implied that the SED policy of industrialisation of agriculture had, as many farmers had predicted, been at best mis-implemented, if not fundamentally ill-conceived. Continuing to supply them at the expense of other smaller LPG Ts, which had been denied the chance to develop but had nonetheless maintained production levels was potentially counterproductive and was bound to anger the farming population. The ideology of progress on which socialist agriculture and socialist ideals of rural development had been built and justified to the rural population was thus seriously under threat from the dire economic straits in which the GDR was increasingly finding itself from the early 1980s onwards.¹

At the start of 1982 there was an increasingly clear imbalance between the financial solvency of the LPG Ps compared with that of the LPG Ts. Eleven times as many LPG Ts as LPG Ps were found to be struggling to maintain production levels. Given that the LPG Ts were in many ways dependent on the LPG Ps for their ability to produce effectively there was a clear issue of cooperation to be addressed.² In the face of this imbalance and with the prospect of a reduction in imported feed supplies, there was strong support within the state and party apparatus as well as amongst farmers for a return to a more traditional symbiotic style of relationship between crop and livestock production. As early as February 1980 a Politburo resolution had been published in the *Neue Deutsche Bauernzeitung* (The New German Farmers' Newspaper) calling upon LPGs to form

¹ SAPMO B-Arch DY30 1512 ZK der SED, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Standpunkt zu den neuen Forderungen der Staatlichen Plankommission 8.9.1981 p.299.

² ThHStAW SED BPA 3865 Übersichtsstatistik Stand 01.10.1982.

cooperative councils to coordinate relations between crop and livestock production. This call was reiterated during the X. SED Party Congress in 1981. An analysis of the district farmers' conferences held in 1982 prior to the XII. German Farmers' Congress noted widespread support for attempts to strengthen cooperative councils. Farmers were clearly motivated by the realisation that the mutually (if not equally) dependent relationship between crop and livestock production needed to be better managed.³ Reports on the situation in agriculture in the various districts of the *Bezirk* discussing the factors which caused particularly LPG Ts to have low production levels, referred again and again to basic problems concerned with the irregularity in the yields and delivery of fodder by the LPG Ps.⁴

Following the XII. German Farmers' Congress (13-14.5.1982) and the promulgation of a new LPG Law in 1982 giving a clear legal basis for cooperation between LPG Ts and LPG Ps, effective action was taken to organise cooperative councils containing delegates from LPG Ps and one or more of their neighbouring LPG Ts. The composition of the cooperative communities which were established in many respects reflected partnerships of previous standing between LPGs and KAPs, although this was not always the case given the pattern of mergers over the previous few years. The tasks of the cooperative council and the central elements of the cooperation between the LPGs were laid out according to a clearly defined and largely uniform pattern.⁵ How effective were the cooperative relations between LPG Ps and LPG Ts varied. In theory the contracts drawn up to regulate the cost, quantity, quality and delivery of feed which the LPG P were to provide LPG Ts were binding. In practice however recourse to the courts to claim restitution for breach of contract was unheard of, leaving the settlement of disputes down in part to the relative strength, characters and connections of the antagonists in their respective LPGs. How well the cooperation functioned depended therefore to a large extent on the abilities of the honorary chairman of the cooperative council.

The KOR chairman was usually one of the heads of the constituent farms and remained in his position on the whole for a period of three years or until he was deemed

³ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Werner Felte DY30/32 ZK der SED, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Information über den Verlauf und Ergebnisse der KBK zur Vorbereitung des XII. Bauernkongresses der DDR 24.2.1982.

⁴ ThHStAW RdB L041357 Rat des Bezirkes Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden für Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Protokoll über die Durchführung des Beschlusses des Rat des Bezirkes Nr.0046 im Kreis Nordhausen 19.4.1982; Information über die Realisierung des Politbürobeschlusses vom 6.4.1982 im Kreis Mühlhausen 19.5.1982.

no longer able to cope with his work load. The role of cooperative council chairman took on increased significance as the state administration devolved considerable powers on to the KORs to coordinate the economic and social development of rural communities within the cooperation. In a Politburo resolution in October 1983 the decision to extend formally the power exercised by the cooperative councils and their chairmen was alluded to in the description of the KOR as having the “the function of an organ which directs the economy”, an ambiguous phrase which caused some confusion among LPG chairmen as well as state and party officials.⁶ The debate as to what this designation might entail saw the prospect of an actual end to the separation of crop and livestock production raised again for discussion within agricultural circles. In DBD members’ assemblies farmers asked whether the LPG Ps and Ts would now in practice be merged together or if still larger single mixed farms would be established.⁷ In essence the Politburo resolution entailed the transfer of a range of powers to the cooperative council to enable it actively to plan and coordinate agricultural production by the various farms within the cooperation over an extended period of time. Without actually cancelling the separation of crop and livestock production, the enhanced standing given to the cooperative councils also enabled cooperating LPG Ps and LPG Ts to be regarded for administrative purposes as single entities. The acquisition of these extended powers and enhanced status took place gradually. Only by the start of 1986 were all farms within the purview of a KOR officially designated with the new functions. Extending the powers of KORs was intended to enable in large part more effective use of funds with which to develop production facilities and organise recruitment and qualification measures territorially in the future. As before however the extent to which KORs fulfilled fully the additional administrative tasks required of them varied considerably.⁸

Considerable efforts were thus made to improve productivity and working conditions in LPG Ts through improved coordination between the administration of crop

⁵ Gabler, D *Entwicklungsabschnitte der Landwirtschaft in der DDR*. (Berlin 1995) pp.300-304.

⁶ There already existed the phrase “organ which leads the economy” but describing the KOR not as being such an “organ” yet having the function of one provoked some debate as to what the difference between the two designations might actually be. No conclusive answer was ever given!

⁷ SAPMO B-Arch DY60 3097 DBD Bezirksverband, Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der Mitgliederversammlungen im Monat Dezember 1983, 8.12.1964.

⁸ see Gabler pp.363-371 Diethelm Gabler devotes considerable space in his book to the constitution of the cooperative councils in Bezirk Erfurt, reproducing a number of documents which describe the duties and responsibilities required of them and the varying extent to which the KOR claimed to have fulfilled them. It is not clear how far the KOR were able or needed to fulfil all these duties

and livestock production. However there continued to be fundamental problems arising from the incompatibility of the manner in which agricultural production had been conducted in the past five years and the new economic climate which did much to undermine these efforts. One of the first issues facing the KORs was how best to organise work brigades and arrange market and feed crop plantations in order to meet the needs of LPG Ts more effectively than had previously been the case, while still fulfilling the quotas for market crops demanded by the state. Intensive specialised production of single crops had to be balanced by the regular removal of manure and slurry from the LPG Ts and the regular supply of sufficient quantities of silage, fresh fodder and other types of feed to the LPG Ts based in different parts of the LPG P's territory. Moreover fuel efficiency in the transport of produce and manpower had to be balanced against the most effective use of land, machinery and fertiliser. Reaching such a balance was no easy task and proved to be beyond the reach of many farms given the difficulties faced by the economy in the GDR.

Mis-industrialisation

The shortage of heavy machinery and spare parts, fertiliser as well as manpower rendered agriculture on an industrial scale increasingly fraught with crisis. No less worrying for farmers was an apparent drop in the fertility of the land in some LPGs thanks to wind damage over the unbroken expanses of oversized fields and soil exhaustion as a result of intensive monocultural plantations. Together these factors rendered the achievement of consistently good yields almost impossible and in so doing prevented the realisation of one of the primary goals of the socialist transformation of agriculture: namely the achievement of consistency, predictability and thus plan-ability in agricultural production. A study of the extent of mechanisation in *Kreis* Eisenach in August 1982 revealed that the LPGs had reached the limit beyond which any further reduction of the workforce would have a serious negative impact on the ability of farmers to maintain agro-technical deadlines. At the same time, it was noted that measures to prevent further erosion of the soil in large parts of the district were necessary.⁹ Ongoing plan shortfalls along with

and responsibilities in practice. Some cooperations were clearly much more successful than others, although this had much to do with the productive capacities of the constituent farms as with the competence of the KOR.

⁹ ThHStAW 041358 Wissenschaftlich-technisches Zentrum der Landwirtschaft des Bezirkes Erfurt, Analyse des gegenwärtigen Standes der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion und Schlussfolgerungen zur weiteren Intensivierung der Produktion im Kreis Eisenach Juli/Augst 1982.

‘unjustified’ variation in yields between similarly situated districts in *Bezirk* Erfurt continued to be reported in 1983.¹⁰ If yields were inconsistent this could only have a negative impact on livestock production. In *Bezirk* Erfurt there had been a drop in the gross turn over in livestock production between 1980 and 1983, with a notable decrease, for example, in the quantity of milk produced per cow at 4% fat content level. In 1982 70 livestock farms had herds producing no more than 2500kg per cow, a figure embarrassingly low considering 3000kg had been considered an attainable target at the start of the 1960s.¹¹

Shortages of fuel were becoming increasingly problematic for agriculture during the course of the 1980s. This was in small part because the quantity of fuel allowed the LPG was often spent on carrying out other tasks within the local community (such as rubbish collection or road repairs). More seriously however, exacerbated by a non-territorial organisation of production, the fuel requirements for transport of manpower as well as crops had been increased considerably and were now unsustainable given the price of oil.¹² With growing uncertainty about how to sustain industrial-style agriculture at a reduced cost and with reduced inputs of key raw materials – in particular fuel – new consideration was given to the optimum organisation of crop production. Plantation sizes had reached averages of over 50 hectares for grain, 40 hectares for potatoes and 57 hectares for sugar beet in the GDR as a whole. In some parts of the GDR, plantations had expanded to as much as 250 hectares. Opinion was growing that such expanses were not sustainable in practice and indeed could have a deleterious effect on productivity. As one report on the subject put it: “the advantages of large field plots with a single crop rotation and integrated deployment of large machines are often exaggerated, while the consequences of high transport requirements for goods and personnel are downplayed”.

Moreover there was growing concern that productivity was being compromised by the lack of personal connection and responsibility felt by the LPG farmer with regard to the land he now worked on. It was argued that the fields should be of a reasonable size to allow those working on them to develop a sense of responsibility for the soil and the yield

¹⁰ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Werner Felfe DY30/141 Berichterstattung im Politbüro, Material zu einigen Problemen der Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft des Bezirkes Erfurt 15.5.1983.

¹¹ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/3097 DBD Bezirksverband, Monatsbericht über die Ergebnisse der Parteiarbeit im Monat November 1984, 8.12.1984.

produced there.¹³ This was of course not simply a question of the size of the fields but how the farmer was deployed to work on them.

It was an essential part of the KOR's work to organise cultivation plans which maximised the use of machinery over large areas as far it was efficient to do so, but took into account the best use of land and the needs of the livestock units in each of the territories which the LPG P encompassed. In conjunction with these cultivation plans, a system of work organisation had also to be established which enabled the deployment of workers with specialised knowledge and training in particular production processes but was flexible enough to cope with territorial differences. As far as the organisation of work brigades was concerned, LPG Ps had long struggled to establish the correct balance between those with territorial and those with task specific responsibilities.¹⁴ Territorial brigades enabled a more flexible approach to the work which needed to be done in a given area of the farm. Having greater knowledge of the land and the range of work which could be done on it at any given time of the year enabled such brigades to respond to sudden shortages or crises at short notice, reducing down-time caused by delays beyond their immediate control. Arguably too the reinvigoration of local pride associated with territorial brigades gave added incentive to farmers to devote themselves to improving production. How far this was true in practice is uncertain. However there is no doubt that the quantity of income collective farmers could earn was essential to the degree to which they accepted the conditions under which they worked.

Following complaints about the feed situation during public meetings at the start of 1985, the *Rat des Bezirkes* did in some cases intervene to alleviate immediate problems in some LPGs. Following a public meeting in Marlishausen, the LPG members successfully called upon the state district functionaries present to take action not only with regard to ensuring punctual collection of animals by the food processing industry but also with regard to the quality and quantity of the feed supplied them locally by the LPG P Bösleben.¹⁵ As a consequence directives were given to the cooperative council in

¹² ThHStAW SED BPA IV/D/2/7-488 Abt. Wirtschaftspolitik, Information zur Einhaltung der Dieselmotorkraftstoffkontingente 1981, 11.12.1981 p.59; Von dem Stellv. des Vorsitzenden für LFN an den Minister für LFN, Gen. Kührig 21.10.1981 p.10.

¹³ SAPMO B-Arch DY30 1512 ZK der SED, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Information zu Schlaggrößen sowie ihr Einfluss auf den effektiven Einsatz der Technik und geringe Transportentfernungen 16.11.1981 p.395.

¹⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA IV/D/2/5-396 Referat des Stellvertreters des Vorsitzenden f. LFN des Rat des Bezirkes am 15.7.1981..p.190

¹⁵ ThHStAW RdB L041358 Bezirkskomitee der Arbeiter- und Bauerninspektion der DDR, Schreiben an den Rat des Bezirkes, Einwohnerforum in Marlieshausen, Kr. Arnstadt 1.2.1985.

Bösleben to reorganise the relationship between crop production and livestock production. The LPG P was to divide itself strictly on a territorial basis in order to guarantee the supply of feed to each of the LPG Ts which relied upon it.¹⁶ So serious was the question of how to provide enough feed and limit expenditure on imports that Honecker sought to impress upon SED party secretaries the absolute necessity of raising fodder production and reducing grain imports at the 3rd Plenary Session of the Central Committee in 1984. As the party secretary of the LPG P Trebra, *Kreis* Sondershausen quoted in an article for *Der Parteiarbeiter* ("The Party Worker"), a journal for SED members: "it affects the life interests of our republic that the yields above all of grain and feed should be systematically increased and thus the imports of grain gradually reduced. Doing this is a matter of the secure provision of the population and of important raw materials. These questions are of increasing importance in the international class confrontation. Today one can certainly compare the grain problem in its status with the oil problem."¹⁷

The attachment of such economic significance to sustaining agricultural production goes some way to explain the renewed interest shown by the Ministry for State Security in the LPGs during the early 1980s. In August 1983 a report on the situation in agriculture in *Bezirk* Erfurt by the head of the responsible department in the *Bezirk* administration of the Stasi called for plans to be made to counter suspected economic sabotage in the LPGs. Judging by the list of recommendations for improvements to the work of Stasi necessary in future, the extent of operations in agriculture had up to this point been greatly limited. This was arguably because of the lack of flash points of overt hostility to SED policy in the sphere of agriculture during the later 1970s, since the transition to separate large-scale crop production had effectively ended the existence of the remaining LPG Type Is. In the Stasi's district administrations the staff responsible for agriculture tended to be responsible for general matters in the whole rural area, with the result that the networks of informers already recruited tended not to be well focused on centres of agricultural production. In a number of industrial livestock production facilities such as the major pork production centre in Neumark, *Kreis* Weimar not a single informer had been recruited in 1983. Quality of information gathering and reporting varied across

¹⁶ ThHStAW RdB L041358 Rat des Bezirkes, Stellvertreter des Vorsitzenden für Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Schreiben an das Bezirkskomitee der Arbeiter- und Bauerninspektion der DDR 4.3.1985.

the *Bezirk*. While the Stasi administrations in districts Weimar and Gotha were praised for being effective at organising cells of informers to infiltrate agriculture, in Nordhausen and Heiligenstadt no such cell had been formed. Heiligenstadt along with Apolda, Eisenach and Erfurt was also criticised for failing to provide sufficient information to the *Bezirk* authority on agricultural affairs.¹⁸ “Unofficial collaborators” and so-called “security deputies” in key positions in the administration of agriculture and the collective farms were to be recruited and charged with looking out for evidence of illegal actions in particular by LPG cadres. The district administrations in Worbis, Bad Langensalza and Sömmerda all began investigations into leading functionaries in the LPGs. Those who had made “negative comments about socialist agricultural policy”, had active contacts in the West, were thought to be maintaining too many private livestock or to be involved in criminal trade above all in stolen animal feed were placed under scrutiny. “Official and unofficial information” collated by the Stasi also caused agricultural functionaries in the state apparatus in a number of districts to come under suspicion for involvement in a similar selection of illegal activities.¹⁹ Ultimately however investigations by the Ministry for State Security were most often prompted by obvious economic failure in an LPG.

At this point, while most of the LPG Ps in the *Bezirk* were able to maintain financial solvency, there were at least 30 LPG Ts considered to be struggling with low production levels. Such was the prevalence of high rates of livestock mortality among those LPGs which were struggling financially that this was taken to be the consequence of economic sabotage or at least criminal negligence. Premature deaths among livestock were caused on the whole by a lack of sufficient feed and overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions for the animals. In some cases there was undoubtedly some mistreatment of livestock and dereliction of duty by those working in the LPGs. Some LPG Ts were no doubt mismanaged. Nonetheless it was clear that in most struggling LPG Ts the basic cause for low productivity levels and high mortality rates lay in insufficient financial and material investment over a number of years. Rather than exposing widespread ‘hostile’ activity, the Stasi investigation illustrated the extent to which the system for scrutinising

¹⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA 3372 SED Bezirksleitung, Entwurf für die Schriftenreihe “Der Parteiarbeiter” von Georg Fister, Parteisekretär der LPG P Trebra, Kr. Sondershausen p.25.

¹⁸ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, BdL 1031, Bericht des Leiters der Abt. XVIII zur politisch-operativen Lage in der Landwirtschaft für die Berichterstattung beim Leiter der Bezirksverwaltung am 22.08.1983, 18.8.1983 p.3.

and taking action to improve the state of affairs in LPGs had consistently failed to have an impact over the course of several years. Officially agricultural functionaries in the district state apparatus were criticised for failing to take action to find solutions to the dire situation some LPG Ts found themselves in. At the same time LPG cadres were blamed and in some cases removed from their posts for failing to take action against irresponsible and negligent work by LPG members, such as their failure to attend the births of new-born animals. It was nevertheless apparent that disparity in the performance of LPGs was the consequence of the state's economic inadequacy and long-running prioritisation of resources.

LPG P cadres too came in for criticism and suspicion if the amounts of produce their farm made available to the state or the quantity of feed they made available to their neighbouring LPG Ts were considered inadequate. The LPG P Isseroda in *Kreis* Weimar and the LPG P in Stockhausen *Kreis* Eisenach were found to be showing particular shortfalls in production. In these cases the heads of the LPG were criticised for mismanaging the farms, though not accused of actual sabotage – in the case of Isseroda low yields were very likely the result of soil exhaustion. There was however also suspicion of LPG cadres in general many of whom were thought to be involved in deliberate misrepresentation of the LPG's actual yields during the harvest, with the intention of building up an unregistered reserve supply of produce.²⁰ Stocks, particularly of grain, were at a premium in the 1980s giving LPGs added incentive to seek to keep control of the amounts they gave up and the payment they received for it. The shortage economy and the half-achieved industrialisation had made it necessary for LPG chairmen to pursue every avenue available to them – including ones which subverted the system - to sustain the levels of profit and production expected of them, by the state on the one hand and the members of the LPGs on the other.

Financial Reform

At the heart of support for a return to “joined-up” crop and livestock production was the hope, particularly among farmers in LPG Ts, that working conditions and incomes would

¹⁹ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, BdL 1031, Bericht des Leiters der Abt. XVIII zur politisch-operativen Lage in der Landwirtschaft für die Berichterstattung beim Leiter der Bezirksverwaltung am 22.08.1983, 18.8.1983 p.3.

be improved as a result. Better relations with the LPG P would bring reduced feed and transport costs and greater financial and material resources with which to develop more efficient, less labour-intensive production facilities. Given the shortage of manpower in agriculture, farmers were already having to perform very high numbers of overtime hours during the late 1970s and 1980s in order to maintain production. Information collected on the level of overtime being carried out in LPGs in response to an *Eingabe* from the chairman of the LPG P Gamstädt, *Kreis* Erfurt-Land noted that in 1980 more than 250 extra hours per fully employed member of the production personnel were being carried out on average in LPGs in the GDR each year. In the LPG Ts the average was considerably higher at 317 hours. This compared unfavourably with workers in industry who performed on average only 57 hours of overtime a year. Thus while each person working in agriculture earned only slightly less than an industrial worker in total, they had to do longer hours. On average the income per hour of an agricultural labourer and member of the LPGs remained at only 88% of that of an industrial worker.²¹ As further reduction of the agricultural workforce became increasingly unsustainable as a result of the lack of machinery and spare parts, there was a clear need to make agriculture attractive enough a job prospect to retain sufficient manpower. Given the ongoing gap in the incomes of farmers and industrial workers, this was a clear area for possible improvement.

In resolutions made by the Politburo in October and then by the Ministerial Council in November 1982, the intention to carry out a price reform in two years time largely to the benefit of agriculture had been settled, predominantly in response to the ever worsening balance between costs and gross production in a large number of the LPGs. Until the price reforms came into effect, in *Bezirk* Erfurt 31 LPG Ps and 89 LPG Ts were not expected to improve the balance of their cost efficiency. Indeed a number of LPG Ts were expected to sustain severe financial losses of several hundred thousand marks.²² The price reform, it was hoped, would explicitly appeal to “good farming traditions of clever calculation”. Moreover it was intended to put a “more correct” value on agricultural

²⁰ BStU Aussenstelle Erfurt, BdL 1031, Bericht des Leiters der Abt. XVIII zur politisch-operativen Lage in der Landwirtschaft für die Berichterstattung beim Leiter der Bezirksverwaltung am 22.08.1983, 18.8.1983 p.3

²¹ SAPMO B-Arch DY30 1926 ZK der SED, Abt. Landwirtschaft, Standpunkt zur Eingabe des Genossen O., Vorsitzender der LPG P Gamstädt, *Kreis* Erfurt. 17.11.1981 p.393.

²² ThHStAW RdB L041333 Rat des Bezirkes, Bericht ‘Auf der Grundlage des Beschlusses des Politbüros...’ undated

production in the GDR and in so doing increase the income of the individual farmer.²³ The report by the *Rat des Bezirkes* on the consequences of the 1984 price reforms for the SED *Bezirksleitung* predicted considerable improvements in the financial stability of the LPGs. The monetary increase in value of the gross product of LPGs in the plans for 1984 would - after the reforms - far outstrip increases in costs. This in turn was expected to be reflected in the level of personal incomes per full-time member of the agricultural workforce which would rise to a planned level of over 10,000 Marks in both crop and livestock farms. The expectation was that there would no longer be any LPG operating at a loss.²⁴ This expectation appears to have been borne out. A report on the state of the finances of the LPGs in the *Bezirk* in 1988 pointed out that the number of LPG Ts which were counted among those with a low production level had been reduced since the early 1980s, and only two LPG Ts were found to be operating with a cost margin which exceeded 100%.²⁵

Although there were some complaints that the price reforms had brought an increase in costs for private small holders who purchased their supplies from the LPG at now increased prices, the overall impact of the price reform was to encourage private production. In *Kreis Sondershausen* the SED *Kreisleitung* intervened to ensure the number of pigs held in private production retained its previous level by encouraging LPGs which sold piglets to private producers to return their prices to the pre-1984 level.²⁶ Information from the Ministerial Council on the effects of the price reform in May 1984 noted above all a positive impact on individual – i.e. private – production with a rise in profits in this branch of agriculture equalling 400 million marks.²⁷ By the late 1980s private smallholders, largely LPG members, were responsible for supplying over 10% of eggs, animals for slaughter and fresh vegetables in the *Bezirk*.

Although private production was vital to maintaining satisfactory production levels, the SED *Bezirksleitung* was aware that the benefits the reforms would bring agriculture overall ought not to be exaggerated. Despite the apparent skew in favour of

²³ ThHStAW RdB L041325 Ministerrat der DDR, Beschluss über die Durchführung der Agrarpreisreform 11.11.1982

²⁴ ThHStAW RdB L041333 Rat des Bezirks, Leiter des Fachorgans für Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Bericht an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung der SED über die Auswirkungen der Agrarpreisreform auf die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Landwirtschaft im Bezirk. 23.5.1984

²⁵ ThHStAW SED BPA 4964, Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt an das Ministerium für Land-, Forst und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft..Analyse zur Wirkung der Agrarpreise...12.04.1988 p.84

²⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA 4047 SED Kreisleitung Sondershausen, Politisch und Organisatorische Massnahmen zur Erfüllung des VW-Planes 1984 10.09.1984 p.24

²⁷ ThHStAW RdB L041325 Ministerrat der DDR, Vertrauliche Verschlussache, Information über die Auswirkungen der Agrarpreisreform auf den Reproduktionsprozess...24.5.1984

agriculture the new prices were designed too to accommodate changes in industrial prices which would eventually increase costs to the LPGs.²⁸ Moreover, although the price reform in theory would enable LPGs to be able to afford to pay for machinery, fertiliser and fuel which they so badly needed and maintain the incomes of the farmers at the levels now expected, there was no guarantee that these resources would be available to purchase. A report on the members' assemblies of the DBD in July 1984 suggested that despite the price reforms farmers were sceptical of the possibilities for increased production given the actually reduced amount of fuel, materials and spare parts available.²⁹ Throughout the late 1980s farmers complained of shortages of vital machinery and equipment. At the district farmers' conferences in 1985 there were widespread complaints about a lack of sufficient machinery for use in the harvest of nearly all main crops, for use in livestock sheds, as well as in the transport and loading and unloading of produce. Shortages of protective clothing, of spare parts, tyres, fertiliser and pesticides were all cause for complaint as well. The situation had become so severe, farmers argued, that even with the greatest care and continual repair of the machinery available it was impossible to harvest within the agro-technical deadlines. Regardless of the quality of the yield that year, losses of produce were therefore bound to occur.³⁰

Despite the formation of the KORs and the price reforms, agriculture in the *Bezirk* as in the country as a whole was still racked with conflict and crisis. The economic performance of LPG Ts remained precarious (even after the price reforms) and many of them had costs which exceeded 90% of their incomes and had not significantly improved their production levels. The worst cases had had long histories of poor production results having failed to transform the conditions of production over the years.³¹ LPG Ps too continued to vary considerably in productivity. Within *Kreis Sömmerda* alone the LPG P Grossbrembach made more than 3 times the profit per full-time employee than the LPG P Kindelbrück.³² A report by the *Rat des Bezirkes* in September 1989, as the first waves of

²⁸ ThHStAW RdB L041333 Bezirksleitung der SED, Stellungnahme zum Bericht des Rates des Bezirkes Erfurt über die Auswirkungen der Agrarpreisreform am 31.05.1984

²⁹ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/3097 DBD Bezirksverband, Einschätzung der Mitgliederversammlungen im Monat Juli 1984, 9.8.1984

³⁰ SAPMO B-Arch Büro Werner Felfe DY30/32 Information für das Politbüro des ZK der SED über die wichtigsten Ergebnisse der KBK 1985 22.4.1985

³¹ ThHStAW RdB L043382 Rat des Bezirkes, Sekretariat des Stellvertreter der Vorsitzenden für Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Bericht an das Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung der SED über die Ergebnisse bei der Festigung der LPG und VEG sowie der weiteren Vertiefung der Kooperation...22.9.1987

³² ThHStAW SED BPA 4964, Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt an das Ministerium für Land-, Forst und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft..Analyse zur Wirkung der Agrarpreise...12.04.1988 p.84

mass protest began to gather strength in the GDR, did not paint a rosy picture of the state of the LPG. Gross production in agriculture had not succeeded in attaining the level of growth required by the national economy and in spite of the price reforms of 1984 there was still considerable variation in the profitability between LPGs, particularly between LPG Ps and Ts.³³

Popular dissatisfaction: Pollution, Shortage and Neglect

Environmental issues were central to the complaints of villagers about deteriorating living and working conditions. Complaints arising from the over-expansion of fields and the overuse of chemical fertiliser had been made sporadically since the 1960s, while concentrated livestock holdings had long been a source of irritation to those who lived nearby. As early as 1968 there was some anxiety that the land improvement schemes which were developed as part of the drive towards a large-scale field system, threatened at the same time to undermine the ecology of the land. According to reports on the SED members' assemblies in the party organisations of the LPG in *Kreis Sömmerda* where land improvements were underway in February 1969 there were continual complaints from members that trees were being cut down but no new trees were being planted elsewhere. This they claimed would lead to a 'steppe-ification' of the countryside and would in the long-run be damaging to agriculture.³⁴ A report by the Workers' and Farmers' Inspectorate in the *Bezirk* on the state of security, order and cleanliness in the villages and farms of the *Bezirk* in April 1969 described poor conditions in a surprisingly high percentage of cases. In over half the villages in the *Bezirk* evidence was found of uncontrolled contamination of the water supply with muck or seepage from the silos. In *Kreis Worbis* this had led in a number of cases even to contamination of swimming pools. 44% of farms in the *Bezirk* were found on investigation to be unclean and disorderly in the vicinity of livestock holdings. Amenities for those working with livestock were also found to be lacking or inadequate in a large proportion of farms. 40% of farms had for example no washrooms near the livestock sheds. More often than not the environmental problems

³³ ThHStAW SED BPA 4964, Rat des Bezirkes Erfurt, Stellv. des Vorsitzenden für Land-, Forst- und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft, Information über die Entwicklung des Rentabilitätsniveau in den LPG...2.9.1989 p.63

³⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA Kreisleitung Sömmerda, IV/B/4.10/101 Abt. Parteiorgane, Einschätzung der MV – Monat Februar 28.2.1969 p.127

caused by livestock holdings was down to a lack of sufficient planning.³⁵ The regularity of such complaints increased considerably however as a result of the expansion of industrialised farming during the 1970s. The failure to deal with the negative side-effects efficiently could only be compounded by a shortage of resources in the 1980s.

An essential question for rural communities throughout the latter part of the GDR's existence was the development of sewage removal and water supply systems. The development of internal plumbing in village houses was a sign of progress, with the proportion of homes with inside toilets marked in SED propaganda as a sign of the benefits of socialism. The issue of water supply and sewage was however fraught in the East German countryside as it was in rural communities throughout much of Europe. The connection of small communities to larger networks could not often be easily justified by the cost and the difficulty of doing so, particularly in a shortage economy. The need for a regularised system however was becoming increasingly pressing with the development of industrial agriculture which itself required an efficient water supply but also had the tendency in rural areas to pollute the drinking water of natural springs on which many villages relied. From the 1960s onwards considerable progress was made in the connection of rural households to a central water supply. Nonetheless the progress was again by no means comprehensive or universal and became a cause of considerable dissatisfaction in those communities which were neglected or suffered the consequences of contamination by agro-industrial production sites.

The problem of disposal of slurry caused particular difficulties for several of the livestock farms in *Kreis* Worbis, leading to mistakes with regard to where it was dispersed. In one case slurry from the LPG Teistungen in July 1988 was mistakenly deposited on meadow land near the village of Jützenbach leading to an *Eingabe* from an outraged villager, because the smell had caused a number of children to be violently sick.³⁶ In 1979 and 1980 a number of *Eingaben* were written from around the *Bezirk* complaining about the deliberate piping of slurry into rivers and lakes by LPG Ts which lacked alternative solutions for disposing of their waste products. Although occasionally fines were imposed for such actions, the balance between economic necessity and the

³⁵ ThHStAW RdB L014785 Arbeiter- und Bauerninspektion Erfurt, Bericht über die Ergebnisse der Massenkontrolle "Sicherheit, Ordnung und Sauberkeit" in den Gemeinden und sozialistischen Landwirtschaftsbetrieben des Bezirkes Erfurt 24.4.1969

rhetoric of environmental protection were clearly heavily skewed in the former's favour.³⁷ These *Eingaben* tallied with an analysis of the *Eingaben* dealt with by the *Rat des Bezirkes'* deputy for the environment and water in the *Bezirke*. Apart from a slight increase during the dry years of 1976, the number of complaints had remained stable between 1974 and 1980. 1981 saw the number of *Eingaben* in this area of government doubled and then trebled in 1982.³⁸

By 1988 the level of connection to a central water supply was supposed to be 98% across the *Bezirke*. However in *Kreis* Erfurt-Land more than 10% of the population remained unconnected despite many years of complaint and lobbying for improvements to be made. A report in October 1988 mentioned "serious" discussions in public meetings in 30 villages in the district on the continued lack of a constant supply of drinking water, which compounded dissatisfaction at problems with the supply of basic food stuffs in villages such as meat, bread and dairy products.³⁹ In *Kreis* Arnstadt where the district could boast a 99.7% connection rate to a water supply, a number of villages continued to complain about the quality of the drinking water with which they were supplied.⁴⁰ A report by the *Rat des Bezirkes'* representative for the environment and water management in *Kreis* Apolda noted that despite 99.1% of the district being connected to a central supply of water, drinking water remained unsuitable for small children. Babies were to be supplied strictly with fizzy water only.⁴¹

The negative consequences of agricultural transformation were felt broadly across rural settlements, the majority of which neither were undergoing serious depopulation nor were clearly slated as centres of production. The mistakes of over-expansion in agriculture and the breakdown in cooperation between crop and livestock production in the late 1970s, compounded by increasingly severe economic problems facing the GDR as a

³⁶ ThHStAW RdB 046350 Rat des Bezirkes, Stellv. des Vorsitzenden für Umwelt...an den Rat des Kreises Worbis 21.6.1988; Rat des Kreises Worbis an Herrn B. Jützenbach 5.7.1988.

³⁷ ThHStAW RdB 046467 Oberflusmeisteri Erfurt für das I. Halbjahr 1979 28.6.1979; Oberflusmeisteri Erfurt, Analyse über die Eingabenarbeit in der Oberflusmeisteri 1979, 6.12.1979; Rat des Kreises Erfurt, Abt. UWE, Eingabenanalyse I. Halbjahr 1980 14.7.1980; Rat des Kreises Worbis, Abt. UWE I. Halbjahr 1980 9.7.1980; Rat des Kreises Weimar, Abt. UWE, Eingabenanalyse III. Quartal 1980 3.10.1980

³⁸ ThHStAW RdB 045464 Rat des Bezirkes, Stellv. des Vorsitzenden für Umwelt., an den Ministerrat der DRR, Stellv. des Vorsitzenden und Minister für Umwelt., Eingabenanalyse 1982, 4.1.1983

³⁹ ThHStAW RdB 046500 Rat des Bezirkes, 1. Stellv. des Vorsitzenden, Stellungnahme zur Berichterstattung des Rates des Kreises Erfurt-Land in Auswertung der Einwohnerforen mit dem Bezirksreferentenkollektiv vom 17.8.1988, 31.10.1988

⁴⁰ ThHStAW RdB 046502 Rat des Bezirkes, 1. Stellv. des Vorsitzenden, Stellungnahme zur Berichterstattung des Rates des Kreises Arnstadt über die Verbesserung der staatlichen Leitungstätigkeit in Auswertung der Einwohnerforen am 16.11.1988, 27.2.1989

⁴¹ ThHStAW RdB 046501 Rat des Bezirkes, Stellv. des Vorsitzenden für Umwelt., Einschätzung zur Leitungstätigkeit des Rat des Kreises Apolda im Umweltschutz und in der Wasserwirtschaft 24.10.1989

whole in the 1980s, served only to exacerbate popular dissatisfaction. Rural settlements were in many respects far worse hit than towns receiving a lower priority in the provision and supply of a whole range of goods and materials which were considered by many basic essentials (rather than luxuries) of an adequate living standard. There was some understanding for these shortages. Villagers did not expect to be able to purchase everything from the local shops. It was obvious too that the cost of supplying a few houses with running water or improving local roads or transport networks could not be always be covered immediately but that money would have to be accumulated. It was recognised by many too that those who lived in rural communities were often able to benefit from privately owned land and livestock and were able too to take advantage of the LPG's support to construct their own houses and carry out improvements to their communities. Nonetheless access to such benefits was limited and the standard of living in other respects still left much to be desired.

In 1978 a report on the quality of supply in Sömmerda district noted an unsurprising though important fact for rural communities: namely that the smaller the community the worse the provision of goods. Thus those villages with less than 800 inhabitants tended to have the worst level of plan fulfilment for supply. The report concluded: "all in all the opinion and attitude of the people with regard to supply is not the best. Above all there is a lack of understanding for the fact that certain products are only being offered in the *Bezirk* and *Kreis* capitals."⁴² This situation was made particularly clear during the cold snap of the winter of 1978 to 1979 which saw several villages in *Kreis* Sömmerda not being supplied with beer for weeks on end.⁴³ In the 1980s shortages of consumer goods in rural shops became a more frequent occurrence, making more frequent trips to the towns an unwelcome and time-consuming necessity. "Customers" it was reported in March 1983 by the SED *Kreisleitung*, Sömmerda, "abuse the sales' girls because those whose wishes could not be fulfilled accuse the staff of wrong doing. These are above all customers from the villages for whom the purchase of certain household goods is barely possible at all anymore." These issues as well as the ongoing shortage of protective work clothing had begun to become a regular topic in assemblies of LPG members. The report writer put the blame (with perhaps a hint of ironic detachment) on

⁴² ThHStAW SED BPA – Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/D/4.10/149 Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation 12.10.1978 p.107

the “rationalisation measures in bulk trade” which had led to “the range and number of goods on offer in towns and villages continually worsening.” The concentration of shopping facilities in urban and industrial centres had led to the closure too of many rural shops whose range of goods and level of turnover no longer justified their existence. “The rural population” the report concluded “is very irritated by this”. Over the following months the lack of a number of popular cigarette brands led to questions being asked in assemblies of LPG members and the lack of availability of non-alcoholic (!) drinks in the villages owing to transport problems was a cause of further complaint.⁴⁴ The problems of access to certain goods presented here was compounded too by the belief that prices were rising beyond the capacity of certain sections of the community to pay for them. Reports from the DBD organisations in *Bezirk* Erfurt recorded some popular acclaim for new measures introduced to improve conditions for vulnerable members of the population in the mid-1980s. Increases in the net incomes of families with more than three children, and of pensioners were welcomed; however it was also felt that these measures should have been taken earlier. The increasing prices demanded for certain goods had long made themselves felt, it was argued, not least because they were often no longer available in the standard *Konsum* shops but were only on sale at an inflated price in the luxury *Delikat* shops.⁴⁵

The sense of rural neglect was added to still further by the failure of basic improvements to be made to what many people now considered basic infrastructure throughout the *Bezirk*. In public meetings in *Kreis* Apolda the lack of road building was a common source of criticism voiced by villagers, as was the ever worsening provision of transport for workers. In Niederroselar the comment was made that: “the workers get driven to work alright, but whether they ever get home, doesn’t bother anyone.” In Sonnendorf, *Kreis* Bad Langensalza a number of complaints were made by villagers, that theirs was a “forgotten village”, owing not least to the lack of improvement to the access road, the lack of bus transport and the lack of repairs carried out to the path to the school in Grossheringen. On these issues however as well as the long-standing supply problems

⁴³ ThHStAW SED BPA – Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/D/4.10/150 Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation 13.02.1979 p.36

⁴⁴ ThHStAW SED BPA – Kreisleitung Sömmerda IV/D/4.10/152 Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation 16.03.1981 p.42; Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation 15.05.1981 p.63; Abt. Parteiorgane, Versorgungsinformation 16.6.1981

⁴⁵ SAPMO B-Arch DY60/3097 DBD Bezirksverband, Einschätzung der Mitgliederversammlungen im Monat Juli 1984, 9.8.1984

to the village, the inhabitants had reportedly ceased to expect much improvement.⁴⁶ Similar feelings of resignation were felt in the village of Friedrichsrode in *Kreis* Sondershausen where the lack of transport connections and the lack of work other than in the turkey farm of the LPG T Immenrode had led to rapid depopulation. All previous *Eingaben* had failed to have an impact, as there was simply not enough economic justification for investment to transform the prospects of this rural community.⁴⁷

The rhetoric of progress espoused by the SED leadership consistently throughout the 1960s and 1970s as justification for the radical transformation of conditions in the countryside with the collectivisation and subsequent industrialisation of agriculture had burdened functionaries in the LPGs and the district party and state administration by the 1980s with great expectations of improvement among collective farmers and villagers more generally. Their consistent failure to provide the promised improvements to quality of life in some rural communities, along with ever more critical working conditions in the LPGs rendered the SED regime's claims to legitimate authority increasingly hollow. The majority of farmers were earning considerably better money than they had ever done before; however there was little to spend it on and, despite the reinvigoration of the KORs, little prospect of actual improvement to either living or working conditions as the basic financial bankruptcy of the GDR under the present SED leadership became ever more tangible.

Conclusion

During the autumn of 1989, the proportion of collective farmers who participated in demonstrations showing their open rejection of the SED regime was not recognisably very high. Nonetheless it was clear that the SED leadership was considered morally as well as financially bankrupt in the villages as elsewhere in the GDR. Loyalty remained in many cases to the LPGs and too to LPG functionaries regardless of their party affiliation. In 1989 and 1990, the LPG Ts and the LPG Ps still remained at the heart of village life and given the enormous lack of certainty about the future, the prospects for the individual remained bound up closely to the prospects for the collective farm to which they belonged. Leading functionaries of LPGs often fought hard to maintain some viable form

⁴⁶ ThHStAW SED BPA 3068, Abt. Agit./Prop, Einwohnerforen im Kreis Apolda am 29.10.1986, 7.11.1986 p.8

of large-scale agricultural production in which to employ as many as possible of the members of the LPGs. However loyalty to the SED regime as a whole evaporated in the countryside as quickly as elsewhere in the GDR. In many villages in *Bezirk* Erfurt, the church had remained of central importance particularly to the older generations who continued to make up a large proportion of the village's population. SED membership and DBD membership had certainly become more commonplace among farmers in the 30 years since collectivisation had got underway, however party groups remained relatively small and weak in comparison to their counterparts in industry. The breakdown of the SED regime was thus not mourned immediately by many.

This thesis does not seek to give a full explanation for the collapse of the GDR or the SED regime. If one were to explain all the causes of the collapse of the SED regime in 1989, one would not necessarily dwell very long on the problems of agricultural production, the failure to improve living conditions in villages or the crisis conditions in some LPG. Nonetheless the growth of popular dissatisfaction with the SED regime and discontent too among party members and functionaries of the state administration as the possibilities for countering the consequences of worsening economic crisis during the late 1980s diminished was part of a complex of causes and consequences which prompted the end of the SED dictatorship. The growth in the extent of popular discontent lent increasing strength to the calls for change begun by small opposition groups. Nonetheless the depth of the impact on the SED leadership of these demonstrations as well as the causes of popular dissatisfaction must be traced to the bankruptcy of the GDR and the withdrawal of Soviet economic and ultimately political support. By the time the borders to West Germany were opened there was little prospect of sustaining the GDR's existence, as the majority of the population looked to the West for economic salvation, rejecting the failed consumer socialism of the SED dictatorship.

⁴⁷ ThHStAW SED BPA 3068, Abt. Agit./Prop, Einwohnerforen im Kreis Sondershausen am 24.9.1986, 30.9.1986 p.22

CONCLUSION

The Practice and Problems of Agricultural Transformation in the GDR

The establishment by force of collectivised farming throughout the GDR was merely the beginning of a gradual process by which the SED leadership sought to establish more comprehensive control over agricultural production. A social and economic transformation in the countryside was to take place under the terms of a specifically 'socialist' modernisation of farming, designed not only to enable increased productivity but also to render agricultural production more easily predictable and plan-able. Under SED guidance the private, small-scale and traditional means of agricultural production were to become progressively more collective, large-scale and industrial. The degree of success which the SED leadership had in achieving these aims in practice depended on the extent to which collective farmers themselves received and understood SED policy and were willing to participate in its implementation. This in turn depended on the efficiency with which policy was communicated and with which the authority of the SED was asserted at the grassroots as mediated by the low-level functionaries of party and state and the LPG themselves.

With a micro analysis of the processes of communication and policy implementation in Bezirk Erfurt, this thesis has attempted to show up in detail how the agricultural administration functioned at the grassroots, primarily during the 1960s and 1970s, a period largely neglected thus far in the historiography. In so doing it has sought to highlight the complexity and variation, even within a confined area, of the manner and consequences of the SED's transformation of agricultural organisation on the ground, not apparent in other accounts of this period.¹ Using documents referring to regional and local circumstances from a range of sources, it has been possible to build up a picture of the conflicts and compromises which took place at the front line of agricultural production at various stages during the GDR's existence. With this picture, some light has been shed on the factors contributing to a stabilisation of SED authority in the GDR during the 1970s: not least how the state's use of force was but one element in the process of consolidation

¹ Gabler, D. *Entwicklungsabschnitte in der Landwirtschaft der DDR* (Berlin 1995). This account of agricultural development in Bezirk Erfurt in various periods from the 1950s to 1989 though detailed in its survey of the various structures of collectivised and industrialised agriculture makes only very limited use of the available sources, tending to provide a superficial account of the practice of policy implementation.

of the LPG and the development of new structures of agricultural organisation, alongside farmers' and functionaries own motives for compromise and participation.

The campaign for full collectivisation itself demonstrated the limited usefulness of implementing policies predicated on the threat of force alone. The building of the Wall was crucial to the stabilisation of SED authority in the GDR, forcing those who remained in the GDR to come to terms with a future in the LPG. Nevertheless there remained a clear deficit of support for the SED's agricultural policies among farmers and LPG functionaries during the 1960s, culminating in the rejection of the forced evolution of cooperative relations between LPGs and the separation of crop and livestock production in 1969. It was not until the early 1970s that a sufficient proportion of LPG members and LPG functionaries were supportive of, or at least reconciled to, the direction of agricultural development in the GDR to enable the implementation of measures to radically alter the manner in which farming was undertaken. Against a background of advances in technology, demographic shifts and an expanded system of agricultural training, by the late 1970s a fundamental transformation of the structure of agricultural production had however taken place in the GDR. In the course of this transformation and the shifting political and economic development of the GDR as a whole, the essentials of an – albeit top heavy – compromise between the SED regime and the collective farmers were established.

In *Bezirk* Erfurt, it was not until some years after Erich Honecker had replaced Walter Ulbricht as General Secretary of the SED that the crucial final step towards an absolute transformation of the basis of agricultural production could be taken. Attempts in the late 1960s to transform rapidly the structure of agricultural production had demonstrated the limited efficiency with which SED policy was communicated to collective farmers and the inadequacy of the SED leadership's authority over the LPGs at this stage. During the early 1970s, after the economic and administrative crises at the end of the Ulbricht era had been overcome, the proportion of farmers and LPG functionaries who were in a position to oppose transition to a specialisation of crop and livestock production under separate administrations was steadily being diminished. At the same time the efficiency with which the SED was able to exert itself in rural communities and communicate with farmers improved.

A renewed confidence in the clear direction of agricultural development among functionaries in the party, state and LPGs in the districts, along with renewed state investment, provided the impetus for LPG members to accept essentially new structures of agricultural organisation. At the same time, the proportion of farmers with a tradition of hostility to SED agricultural policy began to be reduced as new generations of professional collective farmers emerged and consistent economic pressure forced large numbers of LPG Type I members to retire from agriculture and relinquish their livestock to collective control and their land for use in cooperation with other LPGs. Almost simultaneously however agriculture was faced by serious problems of sustaining production as the economic climate in the GDR as a whole began to deteriorate.

Ironically these were problems which the new structures of organisation tended to some extent to exacerbate. Looking at the vulnerability of industrialised agriculture to economic decline, this thesis has attempted too to shed light on some of the factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of the SED dictatorship amid worsening economic circumstances, which hastened its ultimate collapse. Crop production was now so structured towards the use of labour-saving, high-intensity methods and on such a large-scale with a finely balanced system of agro-technical deadlines, that coping with cuts to fuel, fertiliser and machinery threatened to undermine the economies of scale. At the same time livestock production was increasingly dependent on energy to run intensive production plants, as well as on fuel for efficient transport of feed as well as animals. The consolidation of industrial style agriculture during the late 1970s occurred at the same time as a number of factors converged to undermine the strength of the East German economy and deprive industrialised agriculture of the necessary inputs in order to make it efficient. Rising prices on the world markets and cuts to financial and material support coming from the Soviet Union led to shortages of fuel and fertiliser. Moreover the GDR's national debt had risen exponentially during the 1970s, with the result that there were limits on the amount of Western currency which could be spent on imports particularly of necessary feed supplies, while machinery manufactured in the GDR was necessarily being made available for export despite an unsatisfied demand at home.² A tighter prioritisation of resources at all levels led inevitably to some casualties of administrative rationalisation,

² SAPMO B-Arch IV/B 2/2.023/2 Abt. Landwirtschaft an Honecker, Entwicklungsprobleme der Landwirtschaft bei der weiteren Durchführung der Beschlüsse des VIII. und IX. Parteitages. 31.10.1979.

resulting in increasing differentiation in living and working conditions between LPGs and rural communities.³ In these circumstances agricultural production appeared to be becoming less rather than more efficient.⁴ By the mid 1980s the negative effects on living and working conditions in rural communities of the policy of gigantism in agriculture were exacerbated by the inefficiencies of the planned economy. Shortages of essential materials and fuel as well as the environmental impact of industrialised agriculture undermined the advantages of the SED's radical transformatory social and economic policies in the countryside.

Amid much conflict and compromise a limited social and economic transformation of the conditions of agricultural production developed following the completion of full collectivisation, transforming the context in which the SED leadership sought to assert its authority over agricultural production and rural society. Ultimately however the reconfiguration of the administration of agriculture at the grassroots proved unable to prevent, indeed arguably exacerbated the problems of production and the differentiation in living and working conditions in rural communities which so clearly undermined the SED leadership's claims to know best.

³ SAPMO B-Arch IV/B 2/2.023/61 Komitee der ABI, Information über Kontrollergebnisse zur Entwicklung der Tierverluste in der Rinder- und Schweinehaltung 21.11.1978; DY30/1512 ZK Abt. Landwirtschaft, Standpunkt zu den neuen Forderungen der staatlichen Plankommission 8.9.1981 p.299.

⁴ SAPMO B-Arch DY30/1541 ZK Abt. Landwirtschaft, Tendenzen, Ergebnisse und Schlussfolgerungen aus den 7 Bezirksanalysen 24.4.1979 pp.33-56.

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